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The Border Bandits;

OR,

THE HORSE-THIEF'S TRAIL.

BY FRANCIS JOHNSON,
AUTHOR OF "ALAPAHA," "ASSOWAUM," "THE
BUSH RANGER," "THE OUTLAW HUN-
TER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE early history of Arkansas teems with the most thrilling incidents of border life. The hardy pioneers who commenced the settlement of that State had to contend with numerous outlaws that infested their villages, committing all kinds of depredations upon their property.

Horse-stealing was the favorite employment of these desperadoes; and to such an extent did they carry their system of plunder, that the citizens were compelled to form themselves into bodies something like our modern California "vigilance committee," and preserve their property by the enforcement of the code of "Judge Lynch." The "Regulators," as they were styled, struck terror into the guilty hearts of the horse-stealers; and a description of their summary manner of meting out justice will be found in our former tale of "The Regulators of Arkansas." Four of the banditti, led by a desperado who pretended to be a Methodist minister, and who was known as Brother Rawson, had stolen several valuable horses from a rich and influential farmer named Hatfield, and, by several cunning maneuvers, had managed to escape with the property.

Our story commences with the pursuit of these villains by the terrible Regulators, who were close upon their heels.

The outlaws had been discovered by Alapaha, a squaw, and a convert to Rawson's preaching. Of course, it was necessary to remove her suspicions, or silence her forever. Rawson had

left his companions-in-crime for that purpose. How he succeeded we shall see hereafter.

"If Rawson does not soon put an end to that screaming," muttered Cotton, angrily, "he will have some one down upon us before long. I'm sure I heard shooting hereabouts this afternoon, and it is not impossible that there may be hunters in the wood."

"I wish he would come," said Weston, in a tone of vexation. "This floating down with the stream is slow work, and a man can't hold three horses and paddle too. Besides, the beasts are growing restless; the water is cold, and they must think the whole business rather strange and suspicious."

The two men listened for a moment, and again the squaw's shrill cry echoed through the silent night air; and the owl in the dark pines upon the river's bank answered it in

mockery, and flew inquisitively toward the spot whence these dismal sounds proceeded.

"The d—l take the fool!" exclaimed Cotton, "I hope she may escape him. I wish we were only some fifty miles further down the stream. If the red-skin should come upon us now, and give the alarm, we should have a whole army at our heels by to-morrow morning."

"He will not kill her, I hope," said Weston, with a shudder, as he listened, breathless, in the direction of the sounds. "And now, all at once, it is as still as death. My flesh creeps, Cotton—but he will shed no blood?"

"Fool!" muttered Cotton, "would you place the rope around your own neck? Are you anxious that the Regulators should hoist you to the branch of some convenient oak-

tree? Rawson will do what is needful. If the affair can be settled without bloodshed, so much the better; I am no friend of that myself; but if not—"

"Oh, no blood! no blood!" cried Weston, in anguish. "I have joined you to steal horses—there is no sin in that—but blood!—I shudder when I think of it. I will have no blood upon my conscience—and this is a woman."

"So much the more dangerous," replied Cotton, laughing; "at least where silence is concerned. Don't be a fool—Rawson will manage it. He will do nothing but what he—look out for that horse, there; he touches bottom, and is trying to edge in toward the shore. The d—l! that one yonder has already got his hoof in the mud. Take care, Weston! we don't know who may be upon our track."

"Confound the horses!" cried Weston, angrily. "What can keep Rawson so long? The animals are getting impatient, and my hands are getting numb and stiff with holding them so long."

"Yonder is the spot where he was to join us," replied Cotton. "See! there where that cypress-root runs out into the water, just before you. I have often



"I WISH HE WOULD COME," SAID WESTON, IN A TONE OF VEXATION. "THIS FLOATING DOWN WITH THE STREAM IS SLOW WORK."

hunted hereabouts, and I know the bends in the river well enough."

"There is some one standing by the cypress," said Weston, in a whisper. At the same moment the cry of the whip-poor-will sounded from the spot; and Rawson (for it was he) at once sprung from the stone, upon which he was standing, into the water, that here was but a few inches deep, and waded to the boat, as it was imprudent for those on board to come to the shore.

"Here are provisions," he said, in a hoarse voice, as he threw into the boat several slices of venison, strung together upon a stick—"nice eating!"

"Where is the squaw?" asked Weston, gazing anxiously in Rawson's face, which was dark and gloomy.

"Safe!" answered the latter, laconically, as he turned from the inquiring glance of his companion.

"Safe! you have done her no harm, I hope?"

"Nonsense! mind your own business—what are my actions to you? Give me the horses, and do you take to the paddles. The water here is deep, and in this way we shall make more headway."

"How far is it to the place where we land?" asked Cotton.

"Three miles—rather more, if anything."

"And how far do you go with us?"

"About two. We shall soon reach the ridge of hills, and there I shall leave you; but—Weston, come here and take the bridles—Cotton, have you got an old cloth, or the like, about you?"

"What do you want of it? Here is my cravat."

"Give it to me—or, bind it here around my arm—here—here, just close to my shoulder."

"Yes, but you must take off your coat, and even then I can't do it very well; the cursed canoe rocks so, I am afraid of upsetting it."

"Well, I will wait, then, for a quarter of an hour, until we come to a shallow spot; then I will get out and walk along in the water, while you bind it on."

"What is the matter with your shoulder?" asked Cotton, as Rawson drew off his coat, and rolled up his shirt-sleeve.

"Why, the little witch caught up a tomahawk, I don't know how, after I had taken it from her, and—but it's nothing—down yonder, where it looks so clear, there the deep water ends—there we can manage it."

The men now proceeded to the spot pointed out by Rawson; and the latter, after carefully sounding the depth of the water, stepped from the boat, and, as he walked along by the floating skiff, his right hand firmly grasping its edge, Cotton bound up the wound which he had received, and which was by no means a slight one.

"If the moon only shone a little," said Weston, after awhile, "that we might at least know the spot where we are to land!"

"You wish for the moon?" muttered Cotton; "that would help matters! I wish it rained down all the water that can pour from heaven."

The boat now glided along by a steep range of hills, the sharp angles of which extended far into the stream, while a few dark cedar-bushes grew from the perpendicular face of the precipice, and long and gloomy rifts penetrated deep into its bosom. The summit was crowned with tall, waving pines and fir-trees, while cedars and hickories composed the dense, firm, and almost impenetrable underwood.

"We are not far from the spot," said Rawson. "Just below there, is the place where I must leave you, and—Cotton, you know the spot where you are to land?"

"Never fear—I can't miss it; a quarter of a mile lower down there is another such a place. But stay! what is that?—a fire on the shore? Some one's camping there."

"Don't be uneasy," whispered Rawson; "whoever it is, he can't get close to the water, on account of the canebrake, and the trees on the bank will conceal us."

They now heard the barking of a dog upon the shore, and then a man quieting the animal. But, as Rawson had remarked, the canebrake was so dense and entangled, that it was impossible to reach the stream at this spot, or even to see it from the place where the fire was burning; and the boat glided noiselessly down the river, which was here of considerable depth.

"D—n the horses, how they snort!" said Cotton, in a whisper.

"It's time they were on dry land," replied Rawson. "And here is the place where I must leave you: so, row a little nearer, that I may jump; and now, be careful—sit firm."

With these words, he leaped from the rocking boat, upon a projecting stone, waved his hand, and disappeared in the darkness.

And, in truth, it required all the skill of a practiced boatman to prevent the frail boat from being overturned by this movement; yet for Cotton it was attended with but little difficulty. The canoe rocked for a few seconds, and then, without taking in a drop of water, glided smoothly upon its course.

Weston did not again utter a syllable. Since the last convulsive shriek of the squaw, which still sounded in his ears, a strange and unconquerable anguish had taken possession of his bosom. He started up at the slightest sound, and his heart beat with feverish rapidity.

Without exchanging another word, they soon reached the spot which Rawson had designated, where a broad, flat table-rock extended into the stream to nearly half its width, and rose with a gentle ascent to the shore, that was thickly grown with low bushes. They here paused, and led the snorting, stamping horses upon dry land.

"Yes, stamp away," said Cotton, laughing; "you will soon find it warm enough. Hold them for a moment, Weston; I must first sink Haswell's canoe; if it were found, it might excite suspicion. The other may float down the stream; no one knows it, and if any one did, he would think that it had broken loose."

With these words, he hastily threw off his clothes, that they might not hinder him if he should be obliged to swim, filled the canoe partly full with stones, pushed it before him a short distance out into the stream, in order to reach a deeper place, and then inclining it beneath the surface of the water, it slowly sunk to the bottom.

"So," he said, as he leaped to land again, and drew on his clothes—"so, no one will get a sight of that so very soon—at least, not soon enough to do us any damage. But now, onward! the ground here burns under my feet."

"And are you perfectly acquainted with the road?" asked Weston, anxiously. "It takes a good pair of eyes to keep a straight course in the wood by night."

"Never fear," answered Cotton; "besides, we must keep rather on the upland, for the underwood is less thick there, and it is impossible to miss our way. When we are once out of the canebrake (and it is hardly five hundred paces broad,) we shall have no further trouble. Quickly into the saddle, then, Weston! By-the-by what kind of saddles did you bring with you?"

"For you, an old Spanish one; for myself, none at all—I shall take this buffalo-skin. How far is it?"

"Oh, far enough!" replied Cotton. "We shall not get there to-morrow, nor the day after; but that is nothing; a man who deals in this sort of wares must not think much of comfort. Rawson's plan is a capital one, and I reckon we shall reach the Mississippi swamp undisturbed. I am curious to know how matters have fared with Johnson."

"If I only knew that Rawson had not harmed the squaw!" said Weston, with a sigh.

"The d—l take the squaw! what is she to us? Thunder and lightning!—there, it begins to rain again!—but stay—I won't swear—it is all right—all the better for us, and for Johnson in particular, for it will puzzle them most mightily to discover where he came from with the horses. But now, push on, Weston, through here; this is the mouth of a little brook, and it is at least free from cane."

Weston, who in the meanwhile had fastened the buffalo-skin upon one of the horses, now leaped upon its back, and leading two others, followed his companion, who had by this time entered the thicket, and was now lost in the darkness. For a few moments the crashing and crackling of the dry and withered canes could be heard, as the horses forced their way through them; then this sound died away, deathlike stillness rested upon the wilderness, and the gloom of night enveloped this scene of sin and crime.

The reader must now return with us to the ford, near which we stood at the beginning of the foregoing chapter.

The four accomplices had not long disappeared amid the dark shadows of the trees, when the horsemen from Spring Creek, and the

farmers who had joined them at Perryville, came galloping along the road, with pine torches in their hands.

"They are below here," cried Hatfield, bending down upon the stirrup, and holding his torch as close as possible to the ground; "these are my horses. Well, if their impudence isn't beyond bounds—to ride along the broad country road, as if they were mounted upon their own nags! But wait, you rascals, wait—you will not escape us this time!"

"I doubt much if they will wait," rejoined Cook; "these tracks don't look very like it. Thunder! how they have cut up the ground here! Hatfield, we shall have to ride hard to overtake them to-morrow."

"Ride hard! I sha'n't stand upon ruining this beast; all or nothing is the word. I must see these knaves dangling at a rope's end, or I shall never sleep soundly again."

"It seemed to me as if I heard a scream, as we rode around the fallen oak, above, yonder," said Curtis; "didn't you think so?"

"Yes," replied Hatfield, "I heard something, but it was a panther; there are some here still in the canebrake."

"Oh, plenty," cried Cook, especially in this quarter; I shot one a week ago. I saw tracks in abundance."

"How is the ford?" asked Hatfield, bending backward in the saddle; "is there any deep spot that might be dangerous?"

"Yes, on the other side," replied Curtis. "Let me ride on before; I know the place."

With these words, he guided his horse down the steep bank, and rode, followed by the rest in Indian file, to the opposite shore.

"Do you see the tracks here?" asked Hatfield, who closed the train.

"To be sure—of course," answered Curtis, looking back; "they couldn't mount the bank at any other spot. They have kept straight on upon the road, as true as my name is Curtis; they trust to the speed of their beasts."

"Wouldn't it be better if we were to throw our torches away?" inquired Cook. "They will only tell the knaves that we are at their heels."

"That is true," replied Curtis; "let us put out the torches; if they are upon the high-road—and I haven't the least doubt of it—we shall certainly overtake them, and then the light would only warn the fellows. Away with them, then!" And, without waiting for the assent of the rest, he tossed his torch upon the marshy ground, where it was at once extinguished. Cook and the rest followed his example. Hatfield alone still sought, with his light near the ground, to find the well-known hoof-prints again.

"They are up here," cried Curtis, turning to him; "here are the tracks in the road."

"You have trampled them all together," said Hatfield. "Well, on in the dark, then, for all I care! We can't miss the road, I suppose."

"It is impossible," replied Cook; "at least not this night, and it will be daybreak before we reach the place where it begins to grow indistinct."

"Well, forward then!" cried Hatfield, as he threw his torch to the ground—"forward, and I promise the man who first lays hands upon the knaves a barrel of whisky."

The men huzzaed at this offer, and down along the road toward "Hot Springs," they spurred at full speed, following Johnson's tracks.

CHAPTER II.

ABOUT twilight, on the evening during which the events occurred that have been related in the foregoing chapter, the Pittstown ferry-boat, rowed by two sturdy blacks across the Arkansas, landed, on the opposite and southern bank of the river, a single passenger—a young man of pale complexion, who had held a small, rough-haired pony by the bridle while crossing. The traveler paid the required ferriage, and, throwing the bridle upon the horse's neck, let him leap from the boat alone, a feat which the animal performed quite dexterously, and then trotted about twenty paces further up the shore, to feed upon the grass which sprouted sparingly from the sandy soil between the roots of a few solitary birch-trees.

"But, massa," said one of the blacks—a genuine Congo negro, with flat, expanded nostrils, a pair of thin, woolly whiskers, and hair that seemed crisped by the sun rather than naturally curly—"but, massa," he said, when he had placed the half-dollar in a small, dirty,

leather pocket book, and had thrust this with great care into the wide pocket of his cotton trousers, "I have told massa already that there isn't a house within seven miles, and massa will have to sleep in the open air and in the rain."

"I know that," replied the stranger, in a tone of indifference, "but how long is it since the old hut has been deserted—I mean the one that stands not far from here, on the border of the little prairie? Some one dwelt there, formerly—a settler, from Illinois."

"Oh, long, long ago, massa," answered the negro; "the woman died, and—the two children too—and then the man moved away. But before he went, he sold the little piece of land and the hut to my master in Pittstown; and the folks on the other side say that he went home, up the Mississippi."

"Is the hut still standing?"

"Yes, massa, but—"

"Well, is there no roof on it?"

"Oh, yes, massa, a good roof—all pretty much in order; yet—but—the people across say that strange things happen in the house."

"Strange things! how so?"

"Well, the woman that they buried there under the five peach-trees, they say—"

"Walks yet, perhaps?" interrupted the stranger, with a smile.

"Ahem!" ejaculated the two blacks, nodding very significantly; and they gazed timidly up and down the dreary shore.

"Why do they think that?" asked the white man as he turned to leave them; "has any one seen the ghost?"

Again the two negroes nodded in a most fearful manner, for it seemed almost impossible for human beings to perform such a movement so violently without breaking their necks. It needed still another question from the stranger, to obtain further particulars concerning the haunted dwelling; and the one who had first spoken then said that various frightful stories were told of that place, but the account most credited was this: The man had first murdered his wife, whom he wished to get rid of, then his two children; and had afterward gone in a steamboat down the river, whither no one knew. After his departure, two doctors had opened the grave, in the presence of the coroner, and had found their suspicions confirmed. Afterward, one of the doctors, it was said, had stolen the bodies of the two children, and the mother now sought her little ones by night and returned at early daybreak into her grave.

The negro, thinking probably that he had now said as much concerning so gloomy an affair as was advisable considering the proximity of the place, and the increasing darkness, pushed from the shore without waiting for an answer, wished the stranger "Good night," and at once the broad, unwieldy ferry-boat, impelled by regular and powerful oar strokes, glided slowly toward the opposite shore.

Brown—for the stranger was no other than our young friend, who was now on his return to the La Fave—gazed long and thoughtfully after it, as it gradually receded in the mist which lay upon the surface of the stream, and finally appeared only as a dark and distant streak; but still the measured stroke of the oars sounded across sharply and distinctly. At last, this also died away; the boat had reached the bank; and, as if waking from a dream, the young man breathed a heavy, anxious sigh, then walked toward his grazing beast, grasped the bridle, and advanced slowly up the narrow footpath which led from the ferry-landing to the level land that lay above.

When here, he paused for a moment, and gazed in silence at the landscape which lay outspread before him, overhung with dark and threatening clouds. For a distance of a few hundred yards from the river, the soil seemed to have been upturned by the rise of the mighty stream, and to be covered to the depth of several feet with the white sand peculiar to it; for in many places the birches and cottonwood-trees were half buried in it, and the ground itself, with its long and wavy undulations, looked like a billowy sea. Further on, however, where the force of the swollen river had been broken by thickets of papaws and birch-trees, the dazzling-white sandstone lay like a smooth covering of snow upon the original, fruitful soil, extending far inland, where the country, rising higher, had reared a dam against the greedy stream, and rich, green grass formed the soft carpet of a kind of prairie, which soon changed to a vast, wild

plum-garden, whose low and bushy fruit-trees had been planted many years before by the Cherokees. The earlier proprietors of this region had been driven from their lands and homes, and transported further westward.

On the edge of this "Cherokee plum-garden," as the place was named by the inhabitants of the district, stood the small house previously mentioned, which, according to the negro's assertion, was said to be haunted. Notwithstanding this, however, Brown turned his steps toward the spot, and reached the dwelling as twilight gave way to darkness.

It was one of those small cabins which are to be found by thousands in the far West—a low log-hut, with a clay chimney, now thrown down. Around it lay a small waste field, consisting of about two acres, the fence of which had partly fallen from decay, and partly been destroyed by fire. Near by was a dilapidated outhouse, which had served probably as a kitchen or a storehouse; and a crumbling well, the opening of which was protected by a transverse section of a hollow trunk. The place seemed to have been uninhabited for many years, and an air of such wildness and gloom rested upon the desolate spot, that as Brown was about to step across the fallen fence, he paused involuntarily, and glanced toward the adjacent peach-trees, as if taking counsel with himself whether a couch in the open air, beneath the green branches of the forest, were not to be preferred as a resting-place, to the dry yet by no means inviting dwelling. A violent gust of wind from the westward, however, which dashed the mist in fine, cold rain against his face, put an end to his irresolution, and now, without further loss of time, he led his faithful beast into the inclosure to the small out-building, which he first examined, and found to be still habitable. It is true he found himself compelled to remove some heavy beams, in order to give the pony admission; but, in return, he had the satisfaction of knowing that the brave beast, which had borne him over a good stretch of ground during the day, was in dry quarters, and tolerably well protected from the wind. He now took from a small bag, which he carried behind his saddle, a quantity of shelled corn, and poured it into a narrow trough which stood in a corner, having first elevated it to a suitable height by placing beneath it a few fragments of the fence.

Having taken care of his horse, he now thought of his own bed, and entered the house, to rest his weary body beneath its protecting roof, and to gain strength for new exertion. Waste and desolate as it appeared from without, the young hunter was soon convinced that it had very lately afforded shelter and protection to a traveler, for amid the ashes upon the hearth a few live coals were still gleaming. No discovery could have been more opportune. He hastened from the hut, collected an armful of broken rails, cut them into thin chips with his hunting-knife, and soon a cheerful, blazing fire illuminated the apartment.

He now brought in his saddle and horse-blanket, which he spread out before the bright flame, made a frugal supper upon a piece of dried venison, and then cast himself upon the hard yet welcome couch.

Thus far the young man's attention had been occupied by preparations for his own comfort and that of his beast. He had been busily employed, and he had found no time to reflect upon himself or upon his condition; but now, stretched before the crackling coals, in the narrow, fluctuating circle of the flickering light, his heart unlocked itself, and, with the few happy moments so lately enjoyed, his future fate rose grave yet indistinct before his soul. He saw himself engaged in desperate conflict with Mexican hirelings, defending the freedom of a young nation; he saw himself rushing onward against hostile batteries, amid the thunder of death-dealing artillery; he saw himself bleeding, dying, beneath the slain—but upon a field of victory—and an almost triumphant smile overspread his pallid features, as, with a convulsive grasp, he seized the rifle that lay near him, and half-raising himself from his couch, gazed through the fallen chimney out into the dark and starless night. The image of his beloved now appeared suddenly to his fancy. He saw her, like a fair victim, place her hand in that of the husband whom she had been constrained to accept; he saw her grow pale—saw how she looked around in anguish after help from him—heard her half-repressed scream; and the heart of the proud

man sunk beneath the storm of emotion that rushed across his soul; he concealed his face in his hands, cast himself back once more upon his hard couch, and wept—wept as if his heart would break. This wild burst of sorrow, however, yielded at last to a sensation of soft and soothing sadness. With his hand upon his throbbing heart, and his hot brow pressed against the coarse bearskin of his saddle, which served him for a pillow, he prayed for the happiness of her whom he loved—for the repose of his own heavily-burdened bosom—and, with Marion's dear name upon his lips, the god of sleep received him in his soft arms, and bore him to the embraces of the being whom he so deeply adored.

It must have been past midnight when he awoke from his refreshing slumber. On raising his head, he found the fire extinguished, and beheld above him the open chimney, through which the furious storm dashed its chill drops upon his head. The coals were completely quenched—not a spark was to be seen—and, shivering with cold, he removed his couch into the further corner of the building, where he was better protected against the wind and rain, and here awaited the wished-for dawn.

Scarcely had he thrown himself upon his bed, when it seemed to him as if he heard voices without the house. This circumstance at once recalled to his memory the narrative of the negro, which he had almost forgotten; and, raising himself upon his elbow, he first felt carefully for his rifle and his knife, to satisfy himself that these faithful weapons were within his reach, and then listened in breathless expectation. But he heard nothing more; and, smiling at his superstitious fears, he was about to sink upon his couch, when he distinguished, and now close at hand, the sound of human voices. The next moment, some one threw open the door of the hut, and entered the small apartment, while a voice exclaimed—

"The infernal hovel! I began to think I shouldn't find it in the dark. This is a storm; good for business, though."

"Not as wet yet as we want it," replied a second; "it washes the ground a little, but not enough."

"The d—l take it! it's enough for me; I shake so, that my teeth chatter in my head. If we could only light a fire—"

"With what?" asked the other. "Everything is soaked through and through, and I haven't even a hatchet by me to split dry chips. This afternoon, when I was here, I made a little fire, and when I went I covered it carefully with ashes, to preserve the coals; but now," he added, groping with his foot upon the hearth, and pushing the ashes aside, "all is dark as night. But we needn't stay here so very long; I can't, at least, for I must be home again by to-morrow evening, as our neighborhood will be quite in a stir next week. As soon as the storm holds up a little, I'm off."

"I hope our horses won't break loose in the meanwhile. It would have been better to have brought them here."

"There is no danger of that; they keep still in such weather; they won't budge. No, I have them there on purpose, for I don't want to have any horse-tracks seen in this neighborhood. But now to business! the time is precious, and we must make the most of the half-hour that we have to spare. When do you mean to return?"

Brown, whom this strange visit had at first disconcerted, was startled by the singular words: "good for business," in reference to such weather; and he was uncertain, at first, what to do—whether to discover himself, or to keep quiet. But the thought of playing the part of an eavesdropper was repugnant to him, and he was upon the point of revealing his presence by calling out, when his purpose was shaken by the remark of the latter speaker, expressing his unwillingness to leave horse-tracks in the neighborhood.

"Can these men belong to the band for the suppression of which the Regulators have combined together?" was his first thought; and, as the dialogue continued, he became more and more confirmed in this suspicion. He drew his knife, therefore, carefully from its sheath—for, if discovered, it was necessary for him to be prepared for an attack, and ready to defend himself—then holding his breath, he shrunk back into the corner again, to overhear the designs that had brought these worthy people hither, and, if possible, to baffle them.

"When do I return?" answered the other thoughtfully; "why, not before two or three

weeks. The place is far from here, and I must go very prudently to work."

"Mind and be careful at the little brook, before you come to my house," replied the previous speaker. "If the tracks led to my premises, and the d—d Regulators should get wind of it, it might lead to an investigation which would perhaps be as unfortunate for you as for me."

"For me?—how so?"

"Why, if—if they should seize your horses, do you think that I would pay you for them afterward?"

"Ab! I thought you meant something else. Don't be uneasy; I know the necessary precautions. But I have just thought of something: probably I shall not be able to take the horses myself further than the Washita, as I have business there, and higher up the stream. When I have dispatched it, I shall return, and we can settle our accounts. One thing more: trust the man who brings you the horses, in every respect; only—only give him no money for me."

"Never fear. But will he know the spot where he must turn off the road, before he comes to my house?"

"Perfectly! it was he who first described the place to me."

"Do I know him?"

"No, I think not."

"But how can I be sure, then, whether he is the right man, and whether I may trust him?"

"Ha, ha, ha! he knows it well enough; but stay—that you may understand each other the better, he will ask you after the river La Fave. You will answer that it flows near the house. His next question will be, 'How is the pasturage in these parts?' And when, at his third question, he asks you for a drink of water, why, open gate and door to him—you may be sure he is the right one."

"Good! Such caution is necessary, for not only do my neighbors often visit me, but my foster-daughter, who lives in the house, must know nothing of the business. The d—d trust a woman's tongue! it is bad enough that my wife is in the secret. But now, good-night!—the rain is holding up, and I must start for home. It will be better for you to leave this place as soon as possible. I wonder that you have the courage to come here, if half what they say about you is true."

"Old women's stories!" muttered the other; "besides, there's no danger. We shall have a wet day to-morrow, probably."

"I think not; it's already getting colder, and the wind is shifting to the—"

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the other, as his companion paused suddenly, as if disturbed by something.

"It seemed to me as if I heard the stamping of a horse close by," replied the latter.

"Nonsense!" muttered his comrade; "the beasts are a quarter of a mile off. But, come—it really appears as if the storm was passing over."

The door was opened again; the men went out, and deathlike stillness reigned anew in the dark and desolate hut; but Brown lay long motionless, beneath his blanket, and listened to the wind, which now howled furiously through the cracks and crevices of the building, and played with the loosened boards that formed the roof; while, without, the wood rustled and rocked, refusing a passage to the storm, which pursued its path in wild anger down over the broad surface of the Arkansas.

Who could these men be, that had had dealings together in such a night and in such a spot? This was the thought which almost solely occupied Brown's attention. There could be nothing good in their designs, or they would have chosen a better time and place. But who were they? One voice, especially, he thought that he recognized; he was sure, indeed, that he had heard it, but when or where—whether in Arkansas, or in Missouri, or even beyond the Mississippi—it was impossible for him to say. In reflecting upon the subject, his ideas became confused again; he closed his eyes, drew the blanket over his head, in order that, undisturbed by outward impressions, he might follow that voice to the inmost recesses of his memory, and—in a few moments he was asleep again. The two voices now became more and more familiar to him, and at last he could recognize the forms of those who spoke; they were Marion and Rawson. He saw how the beloved maiden fled from the embrace of the

bridegroom who had been forced upon her, further and further, and her pursuer assumed still wilder and more fearful shapes—came nearer and nearer to her—threatened to seize her—and the poor girl, in deathlike anguish, uttered a cry for help, which resounded aloud through the dark and stormy night!

The young man cast his blanket from him in terror, and leaped to his feet; cold drops of sweat stood upon his brow; yet—it was but a dream. Without, the owl whooped its gloomy and monotonous morning-song, a few wolves answered it in the distance, and a faint light in the eastern sky proclaimed the approach of day.

The air had grown keen and cold, the wind had changed to the north, and not a cloud now dimmed the pure, blue firmament. Brown, to whom the occurrence of the past night seemed almost like a vision, so had it blended itself with his dream, stood, thoughtful and musing, and endeavored anew, but still in vain, to associate those persons with some scene of his past life. It was useless, and he was forced at last to confess that he was in error. He now strove to banish his uneasiness, in the business of the moment, and to forget that which he could not alter or fathom. With his last remnant of corn he fed his pony, that whinnied joyfully at his approach; then led the animal to a small pool formed by the rain, where it quenched its thirst; he then saddled and bridled it, and, before the first beams of the sun appeared above the horizon, he was already spurring, at a round trot, on his road homeward.

The fresh morning air, and the rapid motion of his horse, gave new energy both to his mind and body; and the spirited little animal which he bestrode, obedient to the slightest pressure of the spur, trotted, snorting gayly, through the low and marshy valley of the Arkansas, until it reached the nearest range of low hills, and now, feeling firm soil beneath its feet, it coursed onward as if in haste to greet its well-known pasturage again.

Casting a glance on the broad, beaten way before him, our horseman now beheld a foot-traveler walking quickly toward him, and, to his unbounded astonishment, he recognized on approaching him, the Indian.

"Assowaum!" he cried, quickly reining in his steed—which halted of itself, indeed, for it was well acquainted with the red warrior, and knew, of course, that the two friends must stop and speak with each other—"Assowaum, what in all the world brings you this way? Whither are you going?"

"To this spot," answered the Indian calmly, as he grasped the hand which was offered him, and pressed it warmly.

"So, you have come to seek me, then? What has happened?"

"Much—very much. And does my brother know nothing of it?"

"If how should I—have I not been—(and still—the two men last night—their mysterious interview—who knows in what connection it stands with what you have to say to me?)—but, out with it! I am burning with curiosity."

"And do you know nothing?"

"Confound it, Assowaum! don't make such a mighty serious face!" cried Brown, laughing; "when I am on the other bank of the Arkansas, how can I know what happens on the La Fave?"

"But before you left?"

"My quarrel with Heathcote?"

"Heathcote has been murdered," said the Indian, gravely, while he gazed inquiringly in the young man's face.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Brown, reining his beast backward, so that it reared aloft with pain, "that is frightful!"

"Suspicion rests upon you," continued the Indian, still keeping his eye fixed upon him, "and they justify you. The dead man had uttered furious threats—would perhaps have put them in execution—was possibly in the act of doing so—and your deed was, as they say, justifiable, only—"

"Assowaum!" cried the young man, interrupting him, as he leaped from the saddle, and stepped close to the Indian—"Assowaum, by yonder blue heaven above us, by the grave of my father, by this hand which I raise aloft, clean and pure, I am innocent of this murder! I have not seen the unhappy man since the moment when we parted, in front of Roberts's house. Do you still think that I am guilty?"

The Indian reached his hand to him with a smile, and answered in a tone of joy: "Assowaum has never believed it—at least, not from

the moment when he heard that the murdered man had been robbed."

"And they accuse me of this also!" exclaimed Brown in dismay.

"Wicked men, yes; good men know you better. Mr. Harper and Mr. Roberts do not believe it."

At the mention of Roberts's name, Brown concealed his face in his hands, and leaned, sighing, against the saddle of his beast, which stood quietly beside him.

"Let me see your foot," said the Indian, as he drew his tomhawk from his girdle.

"For what? have you measured the tracks?"

"Yes," replied the red-man, nodding; and he placed the handle of the weapon against his friend's foot.

"Three quarters of an inch too long," continued Assowaum, with a quiet laugh of satisfaction.

"I did not wear these boots on the morning when I rode from the La Fave," said Brown, thrusting his hand into his portmanteau. "Here are my moccasins. Were they the tracks of boots, that you discovered at the spot where the deed was perpetrated?"

"Yes," answered the Indian, nodding again; and a new thought seemed to flash upon his mind. He laid his tomhawk on the ground before him, and appeared to be comparing, with the notches on its handle, another measure which he carried in his mind, and marked by spanning his fingers; then he cast, suddenly, a glance so gloomy and steadfast upon the young man, that the latter recoiled a step in terror, and exclaimed: "What is the matter? what are you thinking of?"

"Nothing—nothing," replied the Indian, with a mysterious smile. "Come, we must go back—time flies. They think you guilty—bad men spread all sorts of reports. And the little man is sick—he lies alone; Alapaha has gone to hear the preaching of the pale man, and will not return to tend him until evening. Does not my brother wish to appear, and say that he is innocent?"

"But where was the murder committed? How was it discovered?"

"Come, come—we can walk and speak—Assowaum must go back to the La Fave."

The Indian now returned upon his steps, and Brown was compelled to urge his pony almost to a steady trot, in order to keep pace with him. As they pursued their way, the former acquainted Brown with all the occurrences that he had witnessed, and learned, in return, all that Brown could tell him of the midnight interview of the two men. The Indian said that he had that morning met a man riding upon a tall, brown horse, but that he had been unable to see his face, as he was completely wrapped in a woolen blanket; and that, on perceiving him, the man had drawn it still more closely about him.

"Perhaps this was one of them," continued Assowaum, "perhaps not." And he then added, as he pointed to the hoof-prints which were visible on the road before them, "But here is the trail, and we can follow it."

They were soon diverted from this purpose, however; for when they reached the valley of the La Fave, they found it so wet and miry from the rain of the preceding night, and from the overflowing of a few small mountain brooks, that the Indian proposed that they should proceed directly to the stream, which was not far distant, and continue their journey in a canoe, which he hoped to obtain from a farmer who dwelt on the banks of the river. When the La Fave rose—an occurrence which usually followed with great rapidity after such a rain—it flowed with extraordinary swiftness toward the Arkansas; and although, owing to the numberless windings of the stream, the distance to be traversed would be prolonged by several miles, yet our travelers would reach Harper's dwelling much sooner in the light canoe than if they continued to plod onward over the miry road.

Brown followed the Indian's advice. It was his own wish, indeed, to avoid Roberts's house, which he must necessarily pass in pursuing the high road. Turning from the miry valley, they walked quickly, and without stopping to rest, along the dry, hilly ground, which stretched to the very bank of the river, overhanging it with steep and rough declivities; and the sun was still several hours high when they reached the hut of one of the oldest settlers in that part of the country, a man named Steele. As the Indian had expected, the river was dashing in angry fury against the preci-

pices that confined its course; and the farmer warned them not to trust themselves to the frail bark, as they would be compelled to pass places where, if they were upset, even a practiced swimmer would not be able to save himself. He willingly placed the boat at their disposal, however, and promised on the following day (Monday) to send his oldest boy with the pony down to Harper's dwelling. But Brown at once purchased the canoe of him, as he wished to have one in the river near his uncle's house.

In the meanwhile, their hospitable host had a good meal prepared, to refresh and strengthen the tired travelers. It consisted of prairie-hens, sweet potatoes, mashed pumpkins, corn-bread, and wild honey, to which was added a jug of genuine Monongahela whisky; and the two required but little persuasion to partake of the kindly-offered repast.

"All my folks are off again to-day," said the old man, as a little negro girl brought in the last dish, and filled the glasses of the guests with cool, rich milk.

"Whither?" asked Brown, taking the glass from his lips.

"They have a prayer-meeting to-day," interposed the Indian, as he stuck his knife into the table near him, and took the wing of a prairie-hen in his fingers. "The pale man can not think much good of the people on the La Fave: he makes them pray to their Great Spirit two or three times every week."

"That's true," responded the farmer, after he had taken a hearty pull at the whisky-jug, and then reached it to the young man; "the business is getting rather tough for me. My neighbor here—Smith—he and his whole family, all at once, got religion, as they call it; and then nothing would do but they must take my old woman with them; and now they drag the poor girls off to meeting, who have something else to think of besides praying."

"Women feel the need of turning to God sooner than we men," replied Brown, who thought of his beloved Marion, and of the many times that he had seen her kneeling in childlike devotion. "The various cares and business of life leave us too little time to open our hearts to feelings which must be fostered and cherished, and can not spring at once into being. With women, confined as they are to the narrow sphere of domestic life, religion is almost a part of their being, and I can not blame them if they cling to those pious usages with a warmth and reverence which rude man is far from feeling toward them."

"My good friend," rejoined the old man, in a kind tone, "God forbid that I should take it amiss, or hinder the women, when they wish to pray; but, hang me, if I don't think they have something else to do in the world besides that. The d—l take these over-pious sisters, I say!—and that's the worst thing, I think, that a man with any kind of conscience can wish to the devil."

Assowaum nodded, with a smile, and said; "I will send Alapaba here; such preaching would do her more good than the pale man's."

"Do not misunderstand me," replied Brown. "Heaven knows I hate anything like hypocrisy, and it really seems as if it was getting the upper hand a little in this settlement; yet that is owing perhaps more to the people themselves than to the preacher. I think, at least, that Mr. Rawson speaks with conviction, and feels in his inmost heart that which he preaches."

"To tell the truth, I do not believe that," cried the farmer, moving impatiently upon his seat. "It is true, I have only heard him once, but he didn't please me—the rolling of the eyes is a bad sign. When a man begins by looking like a sick chicken, I can't think he is in a state to have much devotion, but—it's nothing to me—I sha'n't trouble him very soon again; but I really wish he would give my women-folks, one of them at least, each time, a sort o' leave of absence, that it might look here as if I had a home. But they on with their great sun-bonnets, take the books in their hands, and off they ride. Then, late in the evening, when any other Christian being would think of sleep, they dash into the house like a hurricane; and, instead of going honestly and quietly to bed, they sit for hours in the corner, and talk about their sins, and what lost and good-for-nothing mortals they are, and that it's a particular grace that the Almighty troubles himself about them all. Lord! if I didn't know my people pretty well—if I didn't know that they were good and orderly women

and children—why, according to their own words, I should take them for the meanest, rascally pack that ever made their tracks on God's earth. But it is all the fault of this preaching and praying. Thunder and lightning! I make no pretense to any great goodness; I have played more than one prank in my time; but that I should roll and creep around in the dust on that account, and hold my mouth always open for astonishment that the earth hasn't swallowed up so great a sinner—no, no—that's asking too much."

As no one interrupted him, the farmer continued:—

"The preacher was here lately, and wanted to hold a prayer-meeting, but he didn't make it out. I led him around and around the farm, I showed him all my cattle, my horses and cows, my plowed land and my pasture; but that was all: for preaching, he was obliged to go up to Dutton's, and I got rid of him—for the afternoon, at least. But he didn't let me off from evening-prayer: he slept here, and confound me if he didn't keep on his knees in that corner yonder, and reckon over to the Almighty a list, a yard long of things that he didn't deserve, and still that he wanted to have!—But you are ready, and seem to be in a hurry. Well, I won't keep you any longer with my nonsense. But be careful with that nutshell of a thing; the stream is rather angry and an accident might easily happen."

"Have no fear sir," replied Brown, smiling; "we both understand how to manage such a skiff. The Indian will be steersman, and the canoe could not be in better hands. You will not fail to send the pony over to-morrow!"

"To Mr. Harper's?—you may depend upon it," said the farmer. "Your name is Harper, I suppose?"

"Brown, sir."

"Brown?" he exclaimed, quickly, and in a tone of terror, while he gazed steadfastly upon the young man, whose eye calmly supported the scrutiny; "Brown! but not the one who—"

"Who is said to have murdered a Regulator? The same, sir," replied the young man; "but it is an infamous calumny," he continued, while his cheeks were dyed with a deeper red, "and I am on the way home to refute the rumor. I did not slay the man."

"He had threatened to take your life," said the farmer, still half in doubt.

"Yes," exclaimed Brown, proudly and warmly; "and if we had met in honorable combat, and I had slain him, I would then have confessed the deed openly and frankly; but the Indian here tells me that the man was attacked by two, assassinated and robbed, and—but do I look like an assassin?"

"No—God help me, no!" cried the honest farmer, grasping the young man's hand, "no! I do not know you, but there is something brave and honest in your face; and as you say it was not you, why, I believe you! My girls were down at Roberts's yesterday, and they tell me that Mr. Rawson's bride takes your part very warmly."

"Assowaum, we must go," exclaimed Brown turning suddenly to the Indian, and once more the young man warmly pressed the farmer's hand, thanked him not only for his kindness and hospitality, but still more for the confidence which he placed in him, and expressed a hope that his innocence would soon be clearly established.

The men now stepped into the canoe. Assowaum seated himself in the stern, to guide the narrow bark, while Brown took his place at the bows. Both fastened their rifles upon their persons, that they might not lose them in case of an accident, and pushed from the shore the sharp, light craft, which, impelled by two strong and practiced oarsmen, glided with wonderful rapidity over the boiling, foaming stream, and the next moment disappeared around the projecting rocks which formed an abrupt promontory that extended into the river a few hundred paces below the farmer's dwelling.

Fortunately, the two friends passed the most dangerous places while it was still light, and at nightfall reached the shallower but broader part of the stream, where the banks, being no longer overshadowed by thick bushes, every obstacle, whether shoal or drift-wood, which threatened to obstruct their course, could easily be remarked and avoided.

When complete darkness covered the earth, and they were gliding downward in silence, no longer paddling, but steering merely, Assowaum suddenly pointed before him, and called

the attention of his companion, who was sitting with his back to the bows of the bark, to a bright light, which was now visible on the bank, a short distance below them.

"Singular! what can it be?" said Brown, turning his head; "it looks like lights or torches in the thick bushes. Where are we? Is there a house here on the bank?"

"Yes," replied the Indian, softly, steering the canoe toward the spot—"yes, an empty hut—Alapaba was here last evening—we will land." And the next moment the small, light bark grounded upon the shore, where the travelers quickly fastened it with the usual rope, a thin grapevine, to the trunk of a young birch-tree.

CHAPTER III.

It was about two hours past noon, when several groups, advancing simultaneously from various directions, were seen approaching a little log-hut, which lay, alone and secluded, in the vast and silent forest. Its owner, Mr. Mullins, a new settler, an orderly and industrious man, had cleared and cultivated a considerable piece of land in a very short time. Nothing of this was to be seen around the house itself, however; for, contrary to the usual custom of western farmers, the building stood half a mile distant from the field, on the declivity of a small hill, which forms the first slope of the mountain-ridge that separates the water of the La Fave from those of the Petit-Jean. Felled trees and split fence rail lay in wild disorder around the dwelling, imparting a cheerless, nay, a melancholy aspect to the place.

But still and desolate as it had appeared during the entire morning, it was now a scene of life and animation. A horse stood tied to every bush; upon every fallen tree sat two or more men, in their Sunday attire, conversing familiarly together; while the women entered the house, to lay aside their bonnets and shawls, and then, taking advantage of the interval which preceded the arrival of the preacher, to bewail the sins of their neighbors—of course, with a view to excuse them, at least so far as this was compatible with an accurate and complete enumeration thereof.

"It's strange that Mr. Rawson doesn't come," said Mrs. Patton to Mrs. Mullins; "he is usually so punctual."

"He is waiting to come with Miss Roberts," was the answer. "The wedding is to take place in three weeks, and it wouldn't look well if he didn't wait upon his bride."

"What wedding?" inquired three or four others, and they pressed inquisitively forward; "is it really true, then, that Mr. Rawson is to marry Marion?"

"I have it from her mother, and she ought to know; but, I beg you, let it go no further, for I can't say whether they want it to be made public yet. But I declare, here comes the Roberts, without Mr. Rawson! Well, I can't imagine what to—"

"He has gone to the Arkansas," said a young woman, a relative of Bowitt's; "he has found such a field of labor there, perhaps, that he is unable to return at the appointed time."

"That would be a pity," sighed the youngest Miss Steele; "I had reckoned so much upon hearing him preach to-day!"

"Oh, he will come, I am sure!" cried old Mrs. Steele, a round and ruddy matron; "and it is truly needful that we should listen to the word of God in this settlement, when such a flood of sin threatens to deluge the land. May the Lord in His mercy, preserve us!"

"And then there are some people who do not even think of prayer," said Mrs. Bowitt—"people who never go to meeting, even when it's held right next door—people who curse and swear."

"Ah, if I could only get my husband to come a single time, and listen to God's word!" exclaimed Mrs. Cummings; "he always promises, but never performs."

"You must serve him as I served mine lately," replied Mrs. Hackett. "He had laid himself quietly down on the bed in the afternoon, to take a nap; and when he woke up, the room was full of men, and the preacher from the Petit-Jean was just beginning the prayer. You ought to have seen the face he made, but he couldn't help it, and had to listen patiently. Once or twice more so, and I am convinced he will come of himself. Ah, when they have but once felt how sweet and comforting such preaching is, it is sure to draw them again!"

"But Mr. Hackett told my husband," cried

Mrs. Smith, "that the next time he would take the dogs to bed with him, that they might give the alarm when any one came."

"I should like to see him!" answered Mrs. Hackett, indignantly. "The dogs upon my bed, eh? I should like to see who— Good-evening, Mrs. Roberts," she added, interrupting herself, and turning to the latter, who at this moment entered the house with her daughter; "how do you do, Miss Marion?"

The customary greetings were now exchanged on all sides; and, in their eagerness to scrutinize the new dresses of those that arrived, one after another, the women entirely overlooked the entrance of Mr. Rawson, who now stood suddenly in their midst, uttering a friendly salutation.

But, merciful Heaven, how he looked! His face was pale, his cheeks hollow, his eyes sunken, and his voice faltering, as with his left arm thrust far beneath his waistcoat, he crossed the humble threshold.

"Mr. Rawson!" exclaimed all the women, almost in the same breath, "are you sick? what is the matter? you are as pale as death!"

"You must be sick," said Mrs. Roberts, advancing toward him; "or has anything happened?"

"No—nothing—I thank you," replied the preacher, with a friendly smile; "I heartily thank you for your sympathy, my honored friends and sisters: it is probably nothing but the result of fatigue. I come from the northern settlements, and have ridden the whole night through in order to keep my word, and be here at the appointed time. It may have been somewhat more than I could endure, for my frame is little accustomed to such toil."

With these words, he advanced toward Marion, reached her his hand, and, as the young girl remarked the singular manner in which he held his left arm, and asked him, with an air of anxiety, whether any accident had befallen him, the preacher replied:

"It is a trifle; it will soon pass over. Last evening, my horse stumbled over a bough that lay in the path, and threw me against a tree, so that I bruised my arm a little. As it was so slight an injury, I paid no attention to it at first; but the night being cold and damp, the limb swelled toward morning, and it is now a little stiff; but, as I said, it will soon pass over."

"Ah, Mr. Rawson! I have a most excellent liniment," said Mrs. Mullins, approaching him. "If you will let me—"

"I thank you—I thank you right heartily for all this kindness; but it really is not worth the trouble. No, upon my word, I must—excuse me, Sister Mullins. Even were it more serious, I should be unwilling to detain so many pious and trusting souls an hour longer from their Lord! Let us commence, then, worthy friends; you see in what numbers the believers have assembled to-day. Shall we remain in the house, or go into the open air? For the sake of room, I should prefer the latter."

"If it will not be too cold for you?" said Mrs. Roberts, anxiously. "It is still damp, and there is a fresh wind blowing."

"Be not uneasy on my account," replied the preacher, pressing her hand. "I labor in the service of the Lord, and in his service we must not be negligent."

All further remonstrance was useless. The little table was carried out under the two mulberry-trees which the farmer, when he cleared the dense forest that surrounded his house left standing, for the sake of their sweet fruit; and, in the course of half an hour, the shrill, widely-echoing voice of the preacher was sending prayers and words of thanks up toward the pure, blue heavens. And the trees did not fall and crush him! the earth did not swallow up the hypocrite, as he lifted his blood-stained hand toward the all-merciful God, and thanked him that he had blessed his feeble efforts with his paternal grace, and had assembled his little flock, all his faithful ones, here beneath the green verdure of the forest! No avenging bolt struck the treacherous liar to the ground, as he prayed for forgiveness for those who had neglected this opportunity to listen to the word of the Lord, and entreated that they might zealously strive to put away their sins, and become worthy to be called servants of God. He stood erect, and no blush tinged his cheek, as a pleasant sunbeam stole through the dense foliage of the underwood; he stood erect, and no blush tinged his cheek, as the women said in whispers around him, "A glory encircles the

brows of the sainted man!" He stood erect, and did not turn his shameless eyes to the ground, as he met the pure and devout glance of his affianced bride, who now, for the first time, felt drawn toward him with heartfelt affection; for she, like the rest, believed that it was excessive zeal in his pious calling that had thus agitated and changed him. The heart of woman is often won by compassion; and the pale preacher owed to the expression of suffering which marked his features, that which the assiduities and efforts of long months had been unable to obtain. On this evening, Marion thought, for the first time, that she could pass her days quietly and contentedly, if not happily, at his side.

Rawson, in the meanwhile, had concluded his prayer with unalterable calmness; his lips had not trembled as he implored the forgiveness of the Most High for himself and his hearers; his voice had not faltered as he pronounced the word "Amen!" Now, however, while all around him were still prostrate upon their knees—now, a sudden tremor darted through his frame, and he paused for several seconds; for high, high above the waving tops of the oaks, four vultures were sailing over his head toward the north-east. He could not hear the heavy flapping of their wings, yet he knew the spot to which they were proceeding with their necks outstretched, snuffing their prey; he knew what their meal would be, before the sun sunk yonder in the west. Then, collecting himself with a violent effort, he thundered forth a loud "Hallelujah!" as if in wild scorn at his own weakness; and the congregation joined in the well-known strain, while amid the swelling tones he recovered his composure, and gained strength for the conclusion of the service.

During this while, the men who had met here did not all appear to join in the worship, for most of them were collected in a group, at a distance of about a hundred and fifty paces from the assembly. Among them were Barker, the peddler Godwin, Roberts and Wilson, the latter a young settler on the same stream, but on the opposite side of it. Their conversation, however, which the peddler had until now for the most part enlivened with complaints at the dullness of his trade, had stopped for the last few minutes. As the loud-echoing admonitions of the preacher reached their ears, Barker, who was in the act of drawing a small whisky-bottle from his pocket, thrust it back again, somewhat abashed. Wilson, however, observed this movement, and grasped after the arm that was withdrawing the enticing draught.

"Stop, there!" he cried, laughing, "that is clean against the laws of humanity. You let a man get a sight of the genuine stuff, and then you hide it; that will never do!"

"But, Wilson, if Rawson should happen to look this way, or even one of the women—"

"Nonsense! they must have sharp eyes to see what we are doing through the bushes; and even if—the deuce take their clatter—if we came here for that, we might as well be sitting with them yonder, under the mulberry-trees."

"But don't let them see more than is necessary," said Barker. "My old woman is singing with the rest, and I shouldn't hear the last of it for a week."

"There's no danger, old man," replied Wilson, laughing, as he adroitly turned his back to the devout assembly, and, raising the bottle to his lips, gazed at the clear, blue sky for some moments, with very particular attention.

"Come," said Roberts, tilting down the bottom of the whisky-bottle, "don't choke yourself; you would like to live in there, I suppose. If you had paid a little more attention to Rawson's text—to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'—it would have been of great service to you."

"Go to the d—l with your text," answered Wilson, in a tone of vexation as he stretched himself at full length beneath the fir-tree under which he had until now been seated, and gazed up into its thick branches; "we hear nothing, nowadays, in the settlement, but reading of texts, and pointing people to the right way. I am tired of it. What a capital set of fellows we used to have among us!—lads who could not bear a hat upon their heads, nor shoes on their feet; who camped out in rain and snow, and knew as little when it was Sunday as the deer or the bears. Now, a man must go to meeting, not only on Sundays, but on Wednes-

days and Saturdays too, and sing and pray—and why? Because such a smooth-faced, mealy-mouthed— But, true, he is your son-in-law, Roberts—I forgot that."

"Fire away!" cried the old man; "never mind me; perhaps I think a good deal as you do; so, speak out—pull the trigger!"

"Well, well—you understand me, I suppose. I don't like this everlasting 'pointing the way' to Heaven. Who the deuce can follow it in this fashion? When I hear such preaching, it puts me in mind of the new settler up the river—the Dutchman, who came here three months ago. He wanted to go from his house down to Stratton's, and got old Curtis to describe the way to him particularly; and Curt's told him, straight enough, that he must keep on exactly westward, through the canebrake, until he came to the holly-bush thicket, in the clearing; then turn a little to the north, cross the deep slew, where the dry cypresses stand; then go due north as far as the little lake; and from there, leaving the lake to the right, to strike into an almost easterly direction again, otherwise he would come out too high upon the country-road. That was all plain enough, and to hear it, a man would think it was impossible, after such a description, for a fellow with his five sound senses to miss the way. But the Dutchman had scarcely gone a quarter of the way, when he began to wander around in a circle; and when I went out there in the evening, to shoot a wild turkey, I heard him bellow as soon as I had fired, for he now knew that there was a human being near at hand. I have tried it several times since, myself, and sent people that way. Even with the best will, they always came out at the wrong end; and now they want to cut a road through, that they may learn, at last, to march straight."

"It's something like it," said Barker, laughing, "only I don't believe that that fellow yonder, who rolls his eyes so piously and devoutly in his pale face, can ever describe the way rightly. But be that as it may, I don't please me."

"My wife is crazy after him," said Roberts. "It was only last evening that she declared he was a saint, and that a great and blessed change always came over her heart the moment he set foot inside of the door."

"Heaven be gracious to us!" cried Barker, in affright; "the next thing, he will have a pair of wings, and fly up on the branch of a tree, and eat manna."

"Only look how the vultures sail by us to-day!" exclaimed Wilson. "That is the twenty-third that I have counted since I have been lying here."

"The service seems to be just over," said the peddler, who for the last few minutes had listened in silence to the conversation. "That is the concluding hymn—I know it."

"You are musical, then, Godwin?" said Barker, laughing.

"And why not?" replied the other, somewhat piqued. "I understand the violin, and I can play some fine pieces on the flute. If you don't believe me, I have it here." And, with these words, he thrust his hand into his deep coat-pocket, and was about to make good his threat, when Roberts caught him by the arm, exclaiming:—

"For heaven's sake, man, keep the frightful instrument in your pocket! What do you think the pious congregation yonder would say, if we were to strike up our music here? We had such a joke with Wells, down the river! He now lives retired, and never goes anywhere, unless he is asked to a log-rolling, or something of that sort. He stopped at my house one day; he had found a hollow tree full of bees, and he wanted to borrow an ax, as it was too far to go home for one, and—"

"But you were going to say something about music," interrupted the peddler, who was unacquainted with Roberts's propensity.

"Oh, what did you stop him for?" exclaimed Barker; "he was upon the right road. In a minute or two he would have found himself in New Orleans or New York."

"How so?" answered Roberts; "that is all nonsense. I was thinking of neither the one nor the other; I was going to tell you about Wells. His neighbor had brought with him a sort of long, pointed thing, with holes in it, like a flute, only he put his mouth to the end, and not to the side. Well, he stayed over night at Smith's; and as they were going to bed, he takes the—you see he had just come from Fort Gibson, and wasn't acquainted with our customs; he had lived a long while, I be-

lieve, on the Indian border, and always liked to be telling of the endless quarrels and fights they had had with the Cherokees, who had just then been transported westward from Georgia. I was sorry for the poor devils too, for they were shamefully cheated out of their land; but then the rich folks in Washington and New York came—"

"Hurrah!" shouted Barker, who had been waiting for his cue with great earnestness, although with the gravest countenance in the world; "didn't I—"

"Don't shout so," said Wilson: "they are all looking this way. But, thank Heaven, it's over! Rawson has made it quite short today."

"How poorly he looks!" said Roberts. "I was really startled when he met me at the corner of the field down yonder."

"At the corner of the field? I thought he had come from above—from the northern settlements," said Wilson.

"Well, he may have done that," replied Barker. "If, when three miles from here, he turned to the right, to avoid the marshy grounds, he must come out about by the corner of the field. I have ridden the road; but it's much dryer on the upland."

The congregation had by this time broken up, and all were walking promiscuously among each other. Mrs. Barker, however, advanced directly to the merry group, caught her "old man," as she called him, by the button, and spoke very seriously with him for about a quarter of an hour, during which time Wilson thrust his elbow repeatedly against Roberts's ribs, and asked him if he understood the meaning of such a procedure.

"My children, it is growing late," said Smith, at last, who was very regular in his attendance at divine worship, and was considered a very pious man: the sun is setting, and I have several miles to ride. Wilson, will you accompany me?"

"No, I can't," replied the latter; "I have promised Barker to go home with him. He wants to tell me something that happened to him last week."

"Well, I wish you a good time of it," said Mullins, laughing; "only let us hear the story afterward."

"Yes, that you may retail it around as your own," replied Barker. "I have grown to be careful with my stories, for—God bless us! what is the matter with the man?"

This last exclamation had reference to a young man, who at this moment stepped from the thicket and approached them, with a face so pallid and terror-stricken, with eyes so wild and haggard, that several of the women started backward in alarm, while Wilson leaped up, exclaiming:

"Fanning! good gracious! have you lost your senses, to wander around in open day like a corpse, to frighten folks? What has happened?"

"Frightful!" groaned forth the young man, as he sunk breathless at the foot of a tree—"frightful!" he added, in a hollow voice—"yonder, in the old log-hut!"

"Well, what is there, there?" asked a dozen voices at the same instant.

"Let me take breath first. Yonder, in the old log-hut—lies—I shudder when I think of it—lies the dead body of the squaw!"

"Alapaha!" cried the dismayed crowd. "Assowaum's wife!"—"Dreadful!"—"Awful!"—"Horrible!" resounded on all sides. "How did you find her?"—"What did she die of?"—"How does she look?"—"Who is the murderer?" and a thousand similar questions were uttered with the speed of thought.

"I don't know," answered Fanning; "give me time—to collect myself—I have run all the way from the dreadful spot—at full speed—the fright—"

"But tell us! what has happened?"

"Presently—presently. Well, listen, then. I went down to hunt, at the mouth of the river, last week, and day before yesterday I started to return home. Yesterday evening I expected to get as far as Turner's, but it grew dark, and I was obliged to pass the night on the bank, in the midst of the thick cane. How many nights have I spent in the wood alone, how many storms have I endured, and have never known fear! But last night an icy chill ran once or twice over me, and I kindled a fire as large again as I really needed. It must have been a presentiment of what was passing near me. All remained quiet, however: only once my dog barked, and it seemed to me as if I heard the snorting of a horse; but that must

have been a mistake, for the canebrake is impassable there, and the river runs very deep close by the bank.

"Haswell had promised to lend me his canoe, but early in the morning I saw the bees at work, and I tried till noon to find the tree; but, as I did not succeed, I looked around after the canoe, and with no better luck. I followed all the bends of the stream, but I discovered nothing except a handkerchief with provisions, that some hunter must have hung up in the bushes, and forgotten. At last, I went up as far as the road; from here I intended to turn off to the left, about two miles further up the river, to get another canoe that I knew of. But I could not help watching the singular flight of buzzards, all of which seemed to light, not very far from the road. Two fresh wolf-tracks ran along the path, in the very same direction; and, as I was in no particular hurry, I concluded to see what kind of game it was that was lying there.

"When I reached the spot where the little hut stands—it is overgrown with thick underbrush, you know—I felt very sure that one of the hogs, that are always straying about there, had fallen into the clutches of a hungry bear; and then I had that very morning found the tracks of one on the banks of the river; but I was surprised to see that none of the buzzards ventured down; they all sat upon the branches of the trees around the hut, and flapped their wings eagerly as I approached them."

"And the wolves?"

"I didn't look at their tracks. I now knew that the carrion must be in the hut, and I entered it, not yet thinking that it could be a human body; but—I can't describe it—it was the corpse of the squaw! I knew it at once. I rushed out, and ran in wild haste, until I reached the nearest house. Here I found no one at home, except a little black girl, who told me that the folks had all gone to meeting; and on I ran again, to find myself among human beings."

"But you can tell us—"

"Nothing—nothing at all; you must see it for yourself, and at once; the body can't be kept lying there through the night. The wolves were shy to-day of entering a house that had been inhabited by human beings, but as soon as it grows dark they will take courage, and tear the body to pieces."

"But where is Assowaum?" asked Roberts. "Can he be already upon the track of the murderer?"

"Would he have left his squaw unburied?" interrupted Barker. "No—never!"

"It can not be that Assowaum himself—" said Smith, looking timidly around him in the circle. "He was always opposed to her going to the prayer-meetings of the whites, and he has given her many a bitter word on account of her turning to Christianity."

"I would sooner believe she had been murdered by her own mother than by Assowaum!" cried Roberts, warmly. "I know how he loved her.—But we must be gone; the time flies, and it is no small distance. Have you pine for torches in the house?"

"Plenty," answered Mullins, "and ready split. I provided them to carry with me to the salt lick on Monday evening, but this is a more pressing case; we can start at once. Where is Mr. Rawson?"

"Here!" replied the preacher, who thus far had stood leaning against a tree, unheeded by all present. "Yes, we must go at once, and investigate the fearful business."

"You, Mr. Rawson!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts. "You must stay here; you are sick, really sick. You look as pale as a corpse."

"I think it is my duty to go," replied the preacher. "It is true I have a severe pain in my head."

"No, we will not allow it," cried Mrs. Mullins; "the sight would only distress you."

"But I do not know, dear Sister Mullins—"

"Remain here," said Roberts, now mingling in the conversation; "you really look very ill, and we do not need your assistance at the mournful task which we have to perform to-day. To-morrow, at the burial, it will be different; then, if you feel strong enough, we will call upon you for your services."

The preacher nodded in silence, and was about to turn, to proceed toward the house, when his betrothed stepped in his way, gave him her hand, with a half-bashful, half-friendly glance, and whispered softly: "Good-night, Mr. Rawson! Retire to bed, and wake in the morning well and cheerful. Good-night!"

Gentle, loving words were these, and they came like sweet music from the lips of the charming girl; but how they pierced his inmost soul! Startled, shrinking with terror, he was about to recoil from the pure maiden, when his eye met the glances of the bystanders, fastened inquisitively upon him. At once his accustomed firmness returned; he drew the blushing girl to his bosom, pressed a gentle kiss upon her brow, placed his hand in a posture of benediction upon her luxuriant locks, and then walked with a firm step toward the house, to repose upon the warm, soft bed which Mrs. Mullins had prepared for him.

"What a saint!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, as she folded her hands, and, inclining her head toward one shoulder, gazed after him contemptively.

"What an angel!" responded Mrs. Patton, who stood near her, and had heard her words. "The good soul turned pale as death when he heard them speak of a corpse, and began to tremble so! Ah, what a heart!"

"Marion has reason to thank the Lord, upon her bended knees, that he has bestowed upon her such a treasure!" said Mrs. Smith.

"When is the wedding?" asked Mrs. Patton.

"Well, before long," answered Mrs. Smith. "But, there—they are starting off. I wonder if we women couldn't go with them?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Barker, "my old man wouldn't have it; I shall ride home. But let us all meet at the burial to-morrow."

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Smith, as she led her horse to a stump of a tree, and from this mounted to the saddle. The rest, for the most part, followed her example; and a short time after the men had ridden away upon their nimble ponies, and as the sun was setting behind the western range of hills, the female portion of the assembly left the place—yet not without having commissioned their busy hostess to express their warmest wishes to their beloved pastor for his speedy recovery, which the good woman promised to do, as also to tend the sick man with all the care she could bestow upon her own child.

CHAPTER IV.

THE distance from Mullins's house to the old hut was about four miles in a straight direction, but the men had traversed it with extraordinary rapidity, and it was not yet perfectly dark when they reached the small "dead clearing," as such spots were called in the language of the country. Here Roberts paused, dismounted, fastened his horse to a tree (an example followed by all his companions), and then struck a light. They were sixteen in number, but not one of them uttered a word. In silence they gathered wood, and kindled a bright fire; in silence they tied their long, split pine-chips together with strips of green bark; in silence they lighted them by the flame, and, preceded by Roberts and Wilson, entered with throbbing hearts the abode of terror.

The two former advanced nearly to the middle of the hut, and close to the body of the unhappy woman, who had here fallen by the hand of a murderer. The rest pressed after them gently, and now formed a circle around the unhappy victim, while the torches, held high above their heads, fearfully illuminated the scene with their lurid light.

"She has been murdered!" said Roberts, at last, almost in a whisper; and softly it was echoed from the lips of the rest—

"Murdered!"

The fearful deed could no longer be doubted. The gash upon the head, inflicted by a heavy bowie-knife, would alone have been sufficient to destroy vitality—that single gash, even without the three wounds which had been dealt by the same broad and dangerous weapon upon the body, and which had opened a passage to the red life-stream. The squaw, indeed, seemed to have made an obstinate resistance, for the ground was much trampled. It was evident, however, that the first wound had been fatal, since her light garment, composed of dressed skins, was drenched with blood upon one side only, nor was blood found in any other part of the hut than where she lay. After the first blow she must have fallen motionless, and expired on the spot.

"Has any one here a suspicion as to the manner in which the unhappy creature came to an untimely end?" asked Roberts.

No one answered. At last, Barker said:

"It is impossible to look into the hearts of men, and see what is brooding there; but this

woman seemed to me so honest and good, so pleasant and friendly, that I cannot understand in what way she could have made an enemy here in the settlement. I know of no one whom I think capable of committing so frightful a deed."

"Nor I!"—"Nor any of us!" was the deep-sounding answer.

"Who last saw the deceased?" asked Wilson.

"I met the two, Alapaha and Assowaum, yesterday afternoon, on the other side of the river," replied Patton. "They seemed very friendly toward each other, but who can fathom an Indian's plottings?"

"Assowaum is innocent!" responded Roberts, warmly; "I would answer for him with my life! Assowaum is innocent—"

"Of what?" cried the full, clear voice of the chief, who, followed by Brown, appeared at this moment in their midst, and advanced, without a presentiment of evil, toward the middle of the hut, while the men on both sides slowly made way for him, half-shyly, half-compassionately, so that he did not remark the horrible spectacle until he stood close beside the body of his wife.

"Wagh!" he exclaimed, and bounded from the earth like a deer struck by the fatal bullet; "what is that?"

"Alapaha!" ejaculated Brown, in horror. "Alapaha!—Good God!—murdered!"

"Murdered!" re-echoed the Indian, in a wild and hollow tone, while his eyes seemed starting from their orbits, and with an involuntary movement of his right hand he tore the sharp scalping-knife from his belt, as if the assassin stood before him; "who says murdered?"

"Does this look like guilt, ye men of Arkansas?" cried Roberts, as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the savage, and cast an inquiring glance upon his friends.

"Not no, by Heaven!"—"The poor Indian!"—"Horrible!"—"Who can the murderer be?" resounded in hurried exclamations from the lips of those around, while Assowaum glared successively at each in the circle who uttered a word. For a moment he seemed really to have lost all consciousness of his situation. Brown now stepped close to Roberts, and, pointing to the body, said in a low voice, every syllable of which, however, could be distinctly heard:—

"This is the second victim that has fallen by a murderer's hand within a week. Rumor laid the guilt of the first bloodshed at my door. I have returned to confront the accusation—to prove my innocence. My heart is pure from so fearful a crime, but the murderer dwells in the midst of us. A few days ago it was my purpose to leave this State, and depart for Texas; I intend to do so still, but not until the hand is discovered which dealt that wound—not until my name stands pure and spotless again in the eyes of the world. Yet not my plans alone, but my opinions also, have changed. You are aware, men of Arkansas, many of you, at least, who know me well, that thus far I have disapproved of the conduct and designs of the Regulators: I considered the illegality of their proceedings as a sufficient reason why I should condemn them. Now, I no longer think so. Here, at your feet, lies murdered an innocent and harmless being, who never grieved or offended a mortal. Who is there among us that has not been won by her kind and unpretending disposition? who that has not been moved by the conscientious and trusting piety which has led her to forsake the faith of her tribe? She has been murdered; the laws have been unable to protect her; she has been murdered, and the laws are too feeble to overtake and punish the murderer: but here I lift my hand aloft, and swear by the Almighty God that I will use every effort to avenge her death, as well as that of yonder unhappy man—that I will not repose nor rest until we have discovered the brood of adders which has made its nest among us! Men of Arkansas, will you aid me with your arms and with your hearts?"

"Yes," was the low reply, that echoed gloomily through the humble hut—"yes! so may God help us!"

"First of all, then, let us bear the body to the nearest house. Early to-morrow morning we will send for the preacher, who must be somewhere in the settlement; we will then bury the poor woman."

In compliance with this suggestion, several young men set about cutting poles to form a rude bier. Assowaum, who until now had stood in silence near the body, with his glance

fastened upon the features of his dead wife, stepped forward at this moment, and pushed those nearest to him gently away, with a gesture as if he would entreat them to leave the hut.

"What would you do, Assowaum?" inquired Brown.

"Leave me alone!" replied the warrior, sheathing the knife which he still held drawn in his hand; "leave me alone with Alapaha—only for this night!"

"Shall we not remain, and—"

A forbidding gesture from the Indian constrained them to yield to his wishes. They withdrew in silence, and consulted, near the entrance of the hut, as to what course they should pursue.

"Would it not be better for us to camp here in the wood?" said Barker, when they had reached a somewhat distant and rather open space. "Assowaum can watch with the body, and we shall be here on the spot at day-break."

"True," replied Brown; "but, on the way hither, Assowaum told me that my uncle was sick, and that he had dispatched Alapaha to him with provisions. But the unhappy woman has been murdered; the poor, sick man lies alone, therefore, and helpless in his hut. I must be there early to-morrow, at the latest. How, then, if we should go back to Mullins's, find out how Rawson is, and see whether he will be well enough to be present at the funeral to-morrow, and then return before daybreak with food for the Indian? We will then take the body in the canoe to Assowaum's cabin, which lies close to my uncle's dwelling. The Indian will wish to have his wife buried near his wigwam."

"But, with this flood, the canoe can't safely hold more than four persons," said Wilson.

"More need not go in it," replied Brown. "From Mullins's house to Harper's, by taking a direct line through the woods, it is scarcely six miles; it is but a little further, therefore, than it is from here. Wilson and I will attend to the removing of the body, while you, in the meanwhile, can cross the country by land with the preacher. We shall then meet about the same time at my uncle's."

"Very well," said Barker, "I am agreed. But, before we leave this place, shall we not try to discover some traces of the murderer?"

"It would be useless," replied Roberts; "the rain, that poured down in streams after midnight, must have washed away every track, and we should only lose our time. No, the murderer is for the moment safe from all pursuit; but, whoever it may be, he will not escape our search; and then, neither praying priest nor threatening magistrate shall hinder us from punishing the wretches who assail us in our dearest rights."

"I should like to go in to Assowaum once more," observed Brown, lingering.

"Do not disturb him again this evening," answered Roberts. "The Indian has his own views and feelings, and at this moment the sight of a white man, were it even a friend, would hardly be welcome to him, I think."

The men now relighted their torches, most of which they had extinguished, mounted their horses, and rode back to Mullins's; while the lonely log-hut inclosed within its stillness the hapless pair who had lived, not friendless, yet as strangers among a people that had destroyed their tribe, and from whose midst a murderer's hand had now plucked the last tender blossom.

The clear heavens sparkled in their midnight glory; rustling winds played with the towering tops of the gigantic trees, and beat in measured time the vast, wreathing grapevines against the slender, shooting trunks; the river rushed, foaming and roaring, by the half-fallen hut, lashing the shore as if it would fain mount to the bleeding corpse, and bear it in its arms, a plaything for its still wilder comrade, the broad and mighty Arkansas.

Within the hut, however, heedless of the rustling of the trees, of the dashing of the angry waters, sat the Indian, at the feet of his dead wife, gazing, silent and thoughtful, as the men had left him, upon her rigid and bleeding yet still beautiful face. The fire without was almost burnt out, a reddish gleam of flame alone glowing up at intervals, to render the succeeding darkness the more striking and gloomy. Suddenly, as if stung by an adder, the red son of the forest leaped to his feet; his eyes almost burst from their sockets; he darted from the hut, cast some dry fuel that he found

near upon the almost-extinguished fire, fanned it in eager haste anew into a flame, lighted a pine chip, then turned with beating heart toward the body, and scrutinized its features with anxious care.

Alas! the uncertain, flickering light had cheated him. He had fancied that those rigid lineaments had been reanimated, those pale lips unclosed. He could not yet force upon himself the conviction that the wife of his heart, his Alapaha, lay here at his feet dead—dead! His sinking, tortured heart clung to each beam of hope with the strength of despair. But soon the frightful truth stood clear and palpable before his soul. Alapaha, the flower of the prairies, was dead!—naught but a senseless, lifeless body met his fond glance, and sadly he dropped the flaming chip from his faint and powerless hand.

This flitting gleam of hope, however, at least aroused him from his dreamy lethargy. He brushed the long and disordered locks from his brow; glanced, as if incredulous, around the narrow space, for a few seconds; and shrunk together, shuddering, as his eyes again met the rigid, ghastly features of his beloved.

The wolves, which during the former night had not ventured into an abode so lately occupied by man, emboldened now by hunger, approached the spot which held their fearful prey; but, the scent of the numerous fresh footprints scared them back, and they prowled in wide circles around the abode of terror, howling in lamentable, hideous wise their chant of death. Assowaum scarcely heeded them; he knew these hyenas of the forest, but he did not fear them; his thoughts were busied solely with the object of his former love—an object now, alas! of heart-rending grief. Once more he fanned the fire, so that the kindling flames, shining through the doorway, illuminated the cabin as with noonday brightness.

The hut, built years ago by a new settler, who soon deserted it again, had since this time, served only as an occasional retreat to the stray hunter in stormy weather, and thus had gone entirely to decay. The first proprietor had cleared and tilled a small piece of ground close to the dwelling, and planted it with corn, but now a vigorous growth of underwood, with its closely-entangled roots, had occupied the field; and single stems, forcing their way even within the hut, betrayed the luxuriant fertility of the soil, which, here deprived of both rain and sunshine, and moistened only by the damps of the neighboring river, had impelled forth some young oak and hickory saplings on the same spot on which men had, not long since, dwelt beneath a protecting roof. Near one of these saplings lay the body, and Assowaum now walked, prying around, seeking after traces which might reveal the murderer. The men had entirely trampled down the moist soil of the hut, and no other footprints than theirs were visible; yet there, near the little frame upon which Alapaha had dried the venison killed by her husband—in the scattered ashes—he discovered part of a man's footprint which had not been effaced by the others.

Assowaum scanned it long and with the keenest attention. It was the front portion of the foot only; he was unable to distinguish its entire length; and then, again, it was imprinted by a boot such as Brown wore; it might be the track of the young man, who had but just left the hut. Assowaum measured the footprint upon the handle of his tomahawk, and gazed thoughtfully for several minutes upon the trampled ashes.

Such a token, however, was insufficient, and he walked further onward, looking for some object left by the murderer, and found the tomahawk which he had given to Alapaha, and which, covered with blood, seemed to have been hurled by a rude hand into a corner of the hut, and until now had escaped his eagle glance.

A proud smile of triumph played for the first time across the features of the wild warrior, as he remarked the stains of blood upon the light yet sharp weapon. Alapaha had died worthily, like an Indian, and the enemy who had slain her had first bled by her hand. But this brought the memory of his wife's death with redoubled power before his soul; and, straining the tomahawk in his iron fingers, he raised himself erect, and glanced around with flashing eye, as if to find the murderer, and with a cry of vengeance upon his lips strike him to the ground.

Alas, too late! Where was the rescuing hand

in the hour of need? where was his strong heart at the moment of danger? Far, far away, and the poor creature was doomed to fall, helpless and unaided! Assowaum gnashed his teeth in impotent rage, as if this thought darted like a keen blade through his burning brain. But then the cool, reflecting calmness of the Indian prevailed. Again he searched in every corner, every recess of the narrow apartment; then left the hut, and stepping into the open air, with a lighted pine-knot in his hand, he examined every bush, every patch of moss, but in vain! the pouring rain had washed every track away. Between the river and the hut, however, which was now reached by the rising flood, his attention was attracted to some birch-trees, from a portion of the branches of which the leaves seemed to have been violently stripped; but, as we have said, the mounting stream had effaced every track beneath its fury, and, disappointed in his search, the Indian returned gloomily to the hut.

He now prepared the death-couch for his murdered wife. He spread out his blanket, and laid her stiffened limbs thereon; he brought water from the stream, and washed her blood-stained face and hair; then placed her own blanket beneath her head, that she might rest softly and sweetly as in former, happier times; and tried to fold her hands over that heart which had loved him so truly and so warmly. The right hand, however, was fast locked in a convulsive grasp, and he was about to desist from the attempt to force back those fingers that had grown rigid in death, when he felt a hard substance within them; he renewed his efforts, and took from their clasp a black horn button, which she had clutched and retained in the death-struggle.

But of what use was such a token? What clue could it give to the discovery of the murderer? Assowaum shook his head darkly; thrust the button, however, into the ball-pouch at his side; and seated himself once more sadly at his wife's feet, as if she slept merely, and he were watching over her slumbers.

Thus he sat motionless for many hours. The fire sunk together, gleamed up awhile fitfully at intervals, and then died away; thick darkness enveloped the narrow hut; without, in the forest, the wolves retreated timidly from the presence of a human being; not a sound interrupted the solemn stillness, except the dashing and roaring of the river; even the owl had left the fearful spot. All was hushed; and still that dark form sat cowering before the corpse, until the morning wind shook the dew from the bushes—until a bright streak of light in the east proclaimed the approaching day, and the birds of night, with loud and lamentable tones, bade adieu to the departing gloom.

Voices were now heard without the hut; and Brown, followed by Wilson, entered the quiet chamber of mourning. The Indian, however, did not seem to heed them; his eye, which he had not for an instant turned from Alapaha's face, still hung upon her dear features; and when his friend slightly touched his shoulder, he started up as if awaking from a deep sleep.

"Come, Assowaum," said Brown, reaching him his hand, "shake off this grief, and let us to our tasks—first to bury your wife, and then to avenge her!"

The Indian had listened unmoved to the white man's words, until the last fell upon his ear.

"Avenge her!" he cried, leaping up, and his eyes flashed fire; "yes, avenge her! Come, my brother! the sight of this dead body unmans me—come!" With these words, he took the bloody tomahawk, placed it in his belt, and then with calm and steadfast step he aided the two men to transport the body to the frail bark, which, held by its cable of vines, floated upon the waves that broke over the roots of the trees.

Wilson now offered him some refreshment that he had brought with him, but he motioned it away, took silently his accustomed place in the canoe, and guided it—impelled as it was by the vigorous arms of the two men—with the rapidity of lightning over the boiling flood; safely and calmly down the stream toward Harper's dwelling, which lay about ten miles distant.

CHAPTER V.

HARPER'S hut stood scarcely a hundred paces from the bank of the La Fave, overshadowed by young and slender hickory and mulberry

trees. Brown and himself had but recently begun to till the land near the house, and on the north side of the dwelling the felled and partly-chopped, partly-untouched trunks, lay around in wild confusion. In the house itself, on the contrary, various convenient arrangements might be observed, which were rarely to be found in the dwellings of the common farmers. Not only was there an opening made for a small window, but this was actually provided with a sash, set with genuine glass panes; and notwithstanding the proximity of the river, a well had been dug, which afforded a convenient supply of cool and healthy water. In addition to this, there was a plentifully-filled corn-crib; so that the occupants, even though they had as yet raised no grain themselves, were far from being destitute of a good supply. Chickens and ducks, nay, a brood of proud turkeys, crowded, strutting and clucking, around the door, and seemed anxiously waiting for their food; while two strong bay horses, evidently raised at the North, stood at the empty trough, snuffing and whinnying, as if impatient and dissatisfied at not finding the usual quantity of corn in the accustomed place.

The men who were assembled at Mullins's on the preceding evening, had just ridden up to the open space before the house; and the silent, gloomy solitude of the spot seemed to strike all, and Roberts in particular, as being singular and ominous. He spurred to the open door, dismounted, entered, and found his worst fears confirmed. Upon a hard, rude couch, the coverlet of which he had thrown back in the glow of fever, lay the once so cheerful and joyous man, the once so welcome companion, alone and helpless, with not a soul near to reach him a cup of water to cool his burning lips.

Roberts and Barker, deeply moved, stepped to the bedside of the sufferer, and took his hand. Harper did not recognize them, however, but spoke in wild, disordered words of hunts and marches, of his brother who loved the betrothed of another, and of his nephew, who had slain his antagonist, and now appeared before him, covered with his victim's blood. At this moment, Rawson, who had regained all his firmness and calmness, entered the low chamber, and stepped to the bedside of the invalid, who raised himself half-erect at his approach, and cried:—

"Away! away!—wash those hands! wipe the blade—it might betray thee! Ha! thy bullet struck home—what a hole it made!—the wound will be hard to heal—right through the brain!"

Rawson turned pale, and stepped backward with a shudder. Roberts, however, without turning his eyes from the sick man's face, said, in a whisper: "He is dreaming of his nephew. He thinks him guilty, and fears for his life."

"Wild fantasies!" replied the preacher, in a low voice, as, hastily collecting himself, he bent down to the sufferer.

"Mr. Harper," he then continued, in a kind tone, as he placed his cold fingers upon the sick man's burning brow, "collect yourself—friends are near you—" but, before he had finished the words, the invalid started from his couch with a cry of pain:—

"Water! water!" he exclaimed. "The fiend stretches out his claws after me!—it was not I who killed him—no—yes—it was I!—seize—me!—I fired the shot!" With these words he sunk back senseless upon his bed.

"He is very sick," said Barker, in a tone of sympathy. "Stay with him, while I bring him a cup of water to quench his thirst. The cattle, too, must be fed; I can not bear to see the beasts run around so hungry and forlorn."

Without saying more, Barker departed to do as he said; and, before the canoe had reached the landing with its sad freight, he had, with Roberts's aid, cooled the temples of the invalid with wet cloths, arranged his bed, prepared him a refreshing draught, attended to the cattle, swept the house and set it in order, and "fixed everything in comfortable and human fashion," as he said. Rawson, in the mean while sat with Roberts, near the sufferer's bed, and reached him what he desired, until after a protracted delirium, he fell into a slumber induced rather by exhaustion than mental composure.

Soon after, the canoe arrived; and Brown and Wilson, followed by the Indian, carried the body up the bank, and laid it near the moss-covered roots of a gigantic pine.

"Where shall we dig the grave?" asked Mullins, approaching Brown; but Assowaum

grasped the speaker's hand in silence, led him about a hundred paces from the house to an old Indian mound which stood close to his wigwam, a structure covered with undressed skins, and said:

"Let the flower of the prairies repose near the children of the Natchez. Hate and discord in old times kindled their hearts against their red brothers of the South. The Great Spirit has punished them. Let their ashes rest peacefully together."

The men now proceeded to dig up the ground at the described spot, and were then about to place the body in a rude coffin which they had made during the night, and brought with them. The Indian, however, prevented them. He entered his wigwam, and returned with a number of neatly-dressed skins, wrapped them carefully about the lifeless form of the deceased, and then, aided by Brown, laid his young wife in her coffin. Mullins now approached, with a hammer and nails in his hand, to fasten down the lid, but this also the Indian refused to permit.

Rawson now stepped to the open grave, and Assowaum had already made a movement as if to prevent the performance of the Christian rites of burial, when his glance fell upon the Bible which the latter held in his hand, and which the deceased had venerated with such devotion. He hid his face in his hands, kneeled down beside the grave, and now, for the first time, his long-concealed and manfully-suppressed sorrow broke forth, his breast heaved convulsively, and the tears streamed in clear, big drops between his dark fingers, and sunk upon the upturned earth, which in a few moments would cover the being for whom he had forsaken friends and tribe, home and parents, and had become a solitary wanderer among a foreign people.

In the mean while the preacher, in low and faltering tones, had begun his funeral address over the remains of the woman murdered by his own hand. He praised her virtue and piety; he extolled the zeal with which she had clung fast to the true God, and placed her hopes in Him; he spoke of her industry, her love to her husband and chief; and then implored that Heaven, to which he durst not lift his timid, guilty glance, for "mercy for the deceased, and—forgiveness for the hand which had shed, perhaps in anger, innocent blood."

But, before he had concluded his prayer, a strange, wild fire seemed to dart through the Indian's frame. He slowly removed his hands from his eyes, and as his steadfast and piercing glance met that of the preacher, and as the latter, shuddering in secret at the dark, flashing eye of the warrior, paused and was silent, the chief raised his head, grasped the tomahawk which he wore at his belt, and extending his left arm toward the preacher, he said, in a loud and echoing voice:

"Alapaha is dead—her spirit has gone to the happy fields of the white man; her heart had turned from the Great Spirit, whose vengeance has now reached her. But why does the pale man pray to his God that he would show mercy to the woman who forgot all, to belong only to him—who forsook the faith of her people, and prayed to the God of the whites? She needs no mercy. The pale man has often told me that his God was just, and Assowaum's wife need not ask for mercy, even from Him, when she can demand justice. If the God of the whites is just, he cannot refuse to reward the unhappy creature who, for his sake, forgot all that was dear and sacred to her."

Rawson would have interrupted him, but the glance of the savage, which was steadfastly fixed upon him, restrained him; and Assowaum continued in a still louder and more impressive tone:

"But the pale man's lips implore forgiveness for the murderer. He has dipped his hand in the pure blood of the flower of the prairies. Who is there here that did not know and did not love her? No! no forgiveness! A curse light upon the wretch! Assowaum will find him; his life has now but one aim—to punish the murderer. Let white or red earth cover Assowaum afterward, the Great Spirit will welcome him with open arms and a smiling face."

Rawson, who had been compelled to summon up all his self-control, to endure the warrior's dark and threatening glance, now raised his hands aloft in silence, as if absorbed in prayer. Then, after a long and solemn pause, he began:

"Forgive him, Lord! forgive the unhappy man, who, bowed down by bitter grief, has uttered words of anger and of hate, which are not well-pleasing in thy sight. Forgive him, Lord! forgive us all who stand here, indignant at a deed which was foreordained by thine unsearchable wisdom; forgive us, for we also, perhaps, cherish thoughts of anger and of vengeance; and shed down thy light upon us, that we may feel that in thy grace, in thy peace alone, lies true happiness and salvation; and strengthen us, that with pure hearts we may raise our eyes to Thee, all-merciful and all-powerful Being. Amen!"

"Amen!" responded the bystanders, in a whisper. Assowaum alone stood in gloomy silence, with his right hand still grasping the tomahawk, until the coffin was raised by the men, and slowly lowered into the narrow grave. Then his stoicism yielded, and, with his face hid in his hands, he sunk upon the earth; and when he lifted up his head again, the little mound was already raised which was to cover Alapaha's remains forever.

The solemn act was ended, and the men returned to their dwellings, with the exception of Barker and Wilson, who remained with Brown in their friend's little hut, to tend him in his illness, so far as lay in their power. Before Rawson departed, however, Brown approached him, and thanked him for his kind attendance at the burial of the unhappy woman, especially as he was sick and wearied; and begged him, if he did not intend to return at once, to consider his house as his own. Rawson declined this offer, however, under a plea of pressing business, and with a warm benediction upon his lips, and deep devotion and humility in his glance, he left the young man, who gazed long after him, sunk in gloomy thought. This was the man who had robbed him of his whole earthly happiness, or at least had rendered it impossible for him ever to attain it; this was the man to whom the beloved of his heart had pledged her faith—to whom she was destined to belong, till Death, with iron grasp, should rend the ties which God himself had joined, and which man could not put asunder.

"Farewell!" he sighed; "farewell, thou sweet dream of my youthful fancy! farewell, vision of domestic happiness! farewell, thou dear, pure being, and may God soothe thy sufferings! Forget the unhappy man whose sad destiny led him across thy path, to destroy thy peace and his own. Farewell!"

"Farewell!" said Assowaum, in a whisper, who had stepped near him, and overheard his last word; "farewell. Was my white brother speaking with the dead?"

"The dead!" cried Brown, starting.

"Was he not speaking with Alapaha?"

"I was indeed speaking with one dead," whispered Brown, concealing his face in his hands. "Yes, for me she is dead—dead—dead!"

"Dead!" re-echoed Assowaum, gloomily, "murdered! But I must find the murderer. The spirit-bird will whisper the name in my ear, in nightly dreams. I will lie down near the grave until I have heard its voice. Will not my white brother assist me for the sake of the departed? Will he not lend Assowaum his arm and aid, before he goes to another land and fights the freedom of another people?"

Brown gave him his hand in silence, and then repaired slowly to the hut of his sick uncle; while the Indian, repressing his grief for the moment, set about building a roof of strong hides over the grave, to protect it from the rain. The sun had descended to the horizon when he had finished the frail structure, and he now cut with his tomahawk a small opening in its upper extremity, above the spot where the head of the corpse reposed.

"Do you destroy what you have built?" asked Brown, who had left the invalid to the care of his friends for awhile, and now approached the Indian, to persuade him to take some nourishment, which he had not done for nearly four-and-twenty hours.

"I do not destroy it," replied the Indian; "but there must be an opening for the soul, that it may leave the body and return to it again."

"The soul does not return, my poor friend," rejoined the young man, sadly. "It has ascended yonder, where the blessed dwell—it will not miss the earth."

"There are two souls," answered the Indian, softly. "There are two souls," he repeated, more warmly, as he saw that the

white man shook his head in doubt. "Does not Assowaum's soul fly back, in dreams, to the hunting-grounds of his people? Does it not there see the wigwam, before the door of which he sported when a child? Does it not pursue down the dark ravine the elk, as it rushes, snorting and tramping, through the thick forest? Does it not there see the father, whose strong hand helped the feeble boy to bend the bow? Yes—it is far, far away, in distant lands; and still Assowaum lives—he lies upon his couch and breathes. Could he breathe if he had but one soul, and this was tarrying in the land of his tribe, while he himself lives amid the huts of the white men, by the 'Rushing Water?'"

As night fell, Assowaum took his food, which Brown had brought him, placed it near the opening at the head of the grave, and then kindled a small fire before it, which he carefully fed; while, as the darkness increased, infolding the slumbering earth as in a funeral-pall, he sung, in a soft and lamenting tone, the gloomy and monotonous death-song of his tribe.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE full weeks had passed since the scene described in the preceding chapter, but every effort to discover the criminals had proved useless. Brown, whose uncle had by this time nearly recovered, had toiled with unwearied zeal to find some traces of the murderers, but his efforts had been in vain.

For several days after his wife's interment, nothing could induce Assowaum to leave her grave; but then, he had suddenly disappeared, and even Brown himself knew not what had become of him.

The settlers, however, were far from being discouraged by their ill success. On the contrary, they felt the more convinced of the necessity of union, for the defense of their rights, since the legal authorities had not succeeded in discovering the slightest traces of the murderers; and the latter, for the present at least, seemed to enjoy entire safety and impunity.

Satisfied by this of the importance of more serious measures, the greater part of the farmers had joined the society of Regulators, and had appointed a grand meeting for the following day, which was Saturday, in which they were to take into consideration the propriety of energetic steps, and especially to summon before their tribunal certain suspicious persons who dwelt in the neighborhood, but against whom the actual commission of crime could not be proved. Possibly they hoped, by this means, to find a clew which might lead to the discovery of the horse-thieves, among whom they expected, and not without reason, to discover the authors of the two murders that had been committed in the neighborhood.

The warm sunshine rested upon the green foliage of the wood. A quiet stillness reigned over the vast and glorious landscape; not a breath was stirring; but deep, deep within the dark thicket—there, where the waters of the La Fave flow through the dense canebrake, and the gloomy, shadowy brushwood of the swamp—the wild sounds of the chase echoed, and now the low baying, now the clear barking of hounds was heard.

"Heigh!—heigh, ye dogs!—hip! nip!" shouted Roberts, as he pushed his smoking horse across a broad spot of marshy ground, and urged on the already-eager beast with loud cries and violent strokes of the spur, impelling it forward into a maze of dense grapevines. The hounds were far in advance, and the hunters were following the chase singly, as their horses chanced to bear them, or as the path into which they had struck permitted, each cheering on the dogs with an echoing cry whenever he thought himself so near them as to render it possible that he might be heard.

"Heigh!" shouted Roberts once again, as, with his rifle in his left hand, his right brandishing a heavy hunting-knife, to sever the creeping plants and wild vines in case of need, he spurred over a large, uprooted cypress, and at the same moment, with a powerful stroke, severed a thick, green brier, which threatened to interrupt his progress. In doing this, however, he had overlooked a thinner but not less tenacious grapevine; and before he could repeat the stroke, or rein in his eager beast, the latter glided from beneath him, and the next

* The Arkansas.

moment Roberts lay, with rifle and with knife, outstretched upon the earth, near the trunk over which he had leaped so boldly.

"The plague!" he muttered, as with no slight exertion he extricated himself from the tenacious mire into which he had fallen shoulders foremost. "Here, pony! here, here! The d—l take the beast! I believe he means to hunt on his own hook." And he was not far wrong. The sagacious animal, his master's favorite companion of the chase, was too deeply interested in the sport to wait for his rider, and thus waste the precious time. Onward like the wind it dashed, riderless, upon the track of the hounds, and in a few moments was out of sight and hearing.

"He's gone! it's a fact," growled the hunter, looking around and listening for several minutes; "not a sign is to be seen of the beast. Here I am, left finely in the lurch. I wish to—but stop a bit; the chase is turning toward the upland. It would be nothing strange if the panther should make for the bottom—that is, if he don't cross toward the Petit-Jean; and in that case, his favorite spot is the canebrake yonder on the other side of the river. Wait, my boys! perhaps, for all my old bones, I shall be in at the death. Have patience—I have been in a worse fix than this before now."

Roberts's thoughts were leading him back, probably, to the Revolutionary war, for he smiled with great self-complacency; and having, during this soliloquy, cleansed his rifle from the mud, poured fresh powder into the pan, and restored his knife to its sheath, he turned his steps toward the neighboring stream. Here, however, a new and difficult task offered itself to the unhorsed rider, namely, to cross it. In vain he sought up and down the bank for a spot where the river was fordable; he was unable to find one that seemed to promise well for the success of his experiment.

He now perceived, close to the verge of the steep bank, the trunk of a tree, partly rotten, at which a bear seemed to have been busy, and to have torn away several fragments, for the marks of claws were distinctly visible; nay, this had evidently happened since the last rain. The dogs, however, were upon the fresh, warm track of the panther, and it would have been impossible to turn them from it, even if Roberts had entertained the thought. This did not enter his head, however. It was only a few days since that a panther had killed one of his foals, and on the preceding night had leaped from a tree upon the neck of a farm-horse, and lacerating its jugular vein, had thus exhausted and vanquished the stronger and more vigorous animal.

But it was probable, also, as the old hunter well knew, that the panther, should he really return toward the lurking-place which he had so lately left, would not at once swim the river a second time, as that animal is not very fond of the water. It was the more necessary, therefore, to gain the opposite bank without delay. Besides, the baying of the pack was heard with increasing distinctness beyond the stream, and the chase might at any moment turn in this direction. Roberts, therefore, lifted and rolled the aforesaid piece of rotten wood to the steep bank, pushed it down, and then, supporting himself by the canes and reeds, descended to the water. He then laid his rifle upon the piece of timber, and was about to attempt the passage, when his ear again caught the near baying of the dogs on the opposite side of the river, which were now evidently coursing toward him. Suddenly they broke forth into so wild and furious a yelp, that Roberts felt assured that the panther had taken refuge in a tree, and was, for a time, safe from its pursuers.

There was not a moment to be lost, therefore. He at once pushed the piece of wood into the stream, and had passed the middle of the river, though he was still in deep water, when a crashing was heard among the bushes on the opposite shore; the dry canes gave way, and almost at the same instant a dark form appeared on the extreme verge of the bank, and with the rapidity of lightning, plunged beneath the waters, which closed above it.

It was the panther, and he had leaped into the stream so near the hunter, that the latter was wet by the splashing water, and the slightly-agitated waves were still shaking his rude raft as the beast's head rose again; and, without observing or heeding his enemy, the animal swam toward the further shore. But

Roberts had now recovered his coolness and presence of mind, which, at the first moment of surprise, had forsaken him. The lock of his rifle had fortunately remained dry. He quickly cocked the piece, and, supporting himself with his left arm upon the piece of timber, while he struck out slowly with his feet, he turned, and in this somewhat inconvenient posture fired at the panther just as it reached the opposite bank. The beast, struck by the ball, leaped aloft, and then sunk back into the river. Roberts had already opened his lips to utter a shout of triumph, but at the same instant the wounded animal emerged again from the stream; and at the very moment that it was bounding nimbly up the steep acclivity, the swimming hunter, having slightly disturbed the equilibrium of his raft, slipped backward, and disappeared beneath it, with rifle and powder-horn!

As he came splashing and spluttering to the surface again, the hounds, who had been thrown off the track, had reached the very spot from which the panther had taken his plunge, and at once followed their agile precursor, as they remarked the dark form from the river, which they took for their flying enemy. Roberts's situation at this moment was far from being an enviable one; for had the eager dogs reached him while still in deep water, the entire pack would have pressed upon him, and perhaps have throttled him before he could be able to convince them of their error. Fortunately, however, having observed his danger in time, he swam toward the shore, still holding his heavy rifle firmly beneath his arm, and he had scarcely reached a place where he could touch bottom, when the hounds surrounded him; and even Poppy himself, not recognizing his master, assailed him, barking violently. Roberts, however, raised himself on tiptoe, thrust away those nearest him with the butt of his piece, and cried furiously to the startled dogs:

"Back, you beasts! you rascals, back! What, Poppy, you thief, would you bite your own master? Back, there, you scoundrels! take the right track! Ha, Poppy!"

This last exclamation was addressed to his own dog, who now recognized his master, and swam joyfully toward him. Roberts, however, not quite trusting to the truce, recoiled a step with a forbidding gesture, stepped into a deeper hole, and vanished under the water again; and this at the very moment that Barker appeared on the opposite bank, and at once raised his rifle to his shoulder to send a shot at the panther, with whom he supposed the dogs to be engaged. Now, however, it was the latter that protected the hunter from the bullet of his comrade; for Barker still delayed to fire, for fear of injuring one of the animals, and soon, to his no slight astonishment, recognized his friend. The latter, far from suspecting this new danger, had once more gained firm footing; and now, spouting forth the water which he had swallowed, stood cursing the hounds, until he had brought them upon the track of the wounded panther, when, after swimming the stream, they darted furiously after the enemy, and soon treed him on the bottom-land."

"Hallo, Roberts!" cried Barker, from the bank, "what the deuce are you doing there in the La Fave?"

"Playing crab," replied the other, still vexed at his somewhat uncomfortable condition, as he came from the water, and clambered up the slippery bank. This jest was destined to prove truth, however; for twice, before he could reach the height of the bank, he slipped backward with much greater rapidity than he had ascended, and each time, to the delight of his friend, who held his sides with laughter, he sunk above his belt in the water. But his perseverance conquered at last; when near the edge of the bank, he grasped a young tree, raised himself up by it, and disappeared in the thicket, without bestowing a glance upon the shouting Barker.

The latter hastened at once to his horse, which he had left a short distance behind, on hearing the dogs in the water, that he might make his way through the thicket to their assistance; then leaped into the saddle, and galloped toward the ford, which lay further up the river. He at once crossed it, but he reached the scene of action too late, however; for he was still in the canebrake, when he heard the sharp sound of a rifle, followed by the yelling of the dogs, which were crowding eagerly around the foot of the tree. The panther had not yet loosed his hold of the

branches, when Barker emerged upon the small clearing where the chase had at last concentrated itself. With his claws deeply clutched in the branch of an oak, the beast clung with the last strain of his sinews to the protecting tree; but soon a convulsive tremor shook his frame, that hung suspended in the air, proclaiming the death-struggle of the fatally-wounded animal; his clutches relaxed, and he fell amid the wild and noisy pack, striking directly upon a young hound, crushing its spine, while the poor creature, moaning and howling, tried in vain to extricate itself from beneath the heavy burden.

At first it was scarcely possible to draw the crippled beast from among the hounds, which were furiously assailing the dying panther. When this was at last effected, by the combined efforts of the hunters, Cook, to whom the hound belonged, seeing that it was impossible to save the poor animal, placed the muzzle of his rifle to its head, and at once dispatched it.

"That's the seventh dog that I have seen perish in this manner!" said Barker, in a tone of vexation, as he struck the butt of his rifle upon the ground. "But you can't get the stupid cattle out of the way when a beast like that is in a tree; then, before they know it, down he comes, and knocks two or three of 'em to pieces with his heavy, lumbering carcass."

"A bear that I shot last year," said Roberts, while his teeth chattered with the cold, "killed two for me in this way, and broke the hind leg of a third, so that I was obliged to shoot him."

"Hallo, Roberts!" cried Barker, laughing, "you look nicely! Suppose we make a fire? But, Cook, where do you come from? I haven't seen you for these two weeks—not since you took that foolish hunt after the wrong horses. Was it you who shot the beast?"

"Yes," replied Cook, who, having blown the smoke from his rifle, was now busied reloading it; "I was at Harper's, and on hearing the hounds so near, I couldn't keep quiet in the house."

"We are very near Harper's, then?" exclaimed Roberts; "the country about here seems very familiar to me. Ah, yes, it lies up yonder—behind those cypresses."

"Scarcely five hundred paces off," replied Cook. "We had better go at once to the house; then Mr. Roberts can dry himself, while we take off the beast's hide."

"I wish I knew where my horse was," said Roberts, anxiously. "I hope it isn't dangling by the bridle to some bush; it's true I tied a knot in it, and it can't hang down very far—yet it's possible."

"Don't be uneasy," said Barker; "yonder comes Mullins, with the horse. Where did you find him, Mullins?"

"I found him standing yonder," answered Mullins, who came up at this moment, leading the missing animal, "at the place where the panther probably first took to the river; he was grazing, and most likely found the bank too steep for him. But, hallo! that's a big fellow!"

It was indeed a panther of uncommon size. They had hunted it since daybreak, without being able to tree the animal, and they would not yet have succeeded in doing so, but for Roberts's shot, which had weakened and disabled it. They now attempted to place it upon Cook's horse; but, although the latter assured the hunters that the animal had carried more than ten bears, without manifesting the slightest sign of fear, yet it was impossible to get the horse to approach the dead panther, even within a distance of ten paces. It was in vain that they smeared the blood of the animal about its mouth; it was not the blood that terrified it—it was the strange and fearful odor of the beast; and the men were obliged to remove the skin from the panther upon the spot, and to take the hide merely with them. This they with difficulty succeeded in placing upon the horse's back, which, incessantly tossing its head, endeavored, by all imaginable caracoles, to shake off the unpleasant burden.

They soon reached Harper's dwelling, however, fastened their beasts to the adjacent bushes, and entered.

CHAPTER VII.

THE appearance of things in Harper's dwelling was far less comfortable than in times past, when its owner, still in health, and always cheerful, kept bachelor's hall, aided occasionally by Alapaha. It is true he had nearly re-

covered from his illness, but the debility which always results from fever was manifest in all his movements; his round, healthy, and ruddy face, had assumed a dull, ashy hue, and his prominent cheek-bones projected as if, astonished at their transformation, they wished to look about at the remaining features of the countenance to which they belonged.

His neighbors did not forsake him in time of need. All treated him with kindness, and watched alternately with Brown at his bedside during the whole course of his illness, and oftentimes spent entire days in diverting and cheering him.

Barker, in particular, had taken a singular liking to him, and was a frequent and welcome guest in the hut of the two men.

When the hunters entered, Harper was reclining upon a rudely-constructed bedstead, on a mattress filled with Spanish moss; his once-florid cheeks were pale and sunken, and his formerly so active movements had given place to a strange lassitude; his eyes alone, although they had lost somewhat of their fire, shone brightly at the sight of his welcome visitors, and, uttering a hearty greeting, he extended his white and meager hand to each in his turn.

"You are welcome all! I am glad to see you, Roberts; you are a fine fellow—it takes wild beasts to bring you to me, then! But, God bless me, you look as if you had been dragged through a pond! Here, Bill, give Roberts a change of clothes, he'll get his death."

"Thank you! thank you!" replied the latter. The young man now brought him warm, dry garments, and assisted him to change his dress.

"I am very much obliged. But, Brown, I have a bone to pick with you. My wife is in a fine humor with you for keeping yourself so out of the way. Since the panther business you know—when Marion was with you, and you must have fairly hit the beast, for Cook's eldest boy found it, as I heard two days after—or at least the skeleton and a part of the hide, for the buzzards—"

Barker had quietly suffered him to continue but he now seized him by the arm, exclaiming:—

"Hallo, there!—there he travels again, straight eastward, like the mail-coach. Come, sit down by the fire; and you, Harper, draw nearer the chimney-corner, for though we have stopped the chinks, yet there is air enough still, and you might take cold, the wind whistles keenly."

"Have you a wash-basin, here?" asked Roberts. "I got my hands all covered with mud, in climbing up the bank!"

"Cook, be so good as to give him the tin pan yonder—the one with no handle—you know it."

"Know it?" replied the young farmer laughing, while with a long-handled gourd he poured water from a pail that stood before the door into the aforesaid vessel; "of course I know your traps here, and perhaps better than yourself just now. It doesn't take so long a time to get acquainted with them."

"No towel?" asked Roberts.

"Well, I suppose you have a handkerchief about you," replied Cook.

"Yes, but it is all wet."

"Well, then, take mine."

"You must tell me about the hunt," cried Harper. "That's a monstrous big panther's skin. Won't you spread it out, Cook, or hang it on the little maple-tree to the right? The confounded dogs tore the last deerskin I got to pieces—the varmints!"

Roberts was now obliged to recount his adventure, while Cook spread out the skin in a safe place, though he had enough to do in the mean while in keeping the narrator within due bounds.

"Tell me, Roberts," he exclaimed, at last, when the latter had ended, "did you talk in that fashion when you courted your present wife? By the Lord, if I had been in her place, I should have lost all patience!"

"Drop that, just now, Cook," answered Roberts. "To-day is the first time that I have seen you since you followed the tracks of the wrong horses. How was the business?"

"True, and he has never told me about it," cried Harper, "though he has been here every day."

"You were sick," replied Cook; "why should I have troubled you with the tedious story? Well, the business is very simple. We found the tracks; they led across the river, and we followed them, because we naturally

took them for the right ones, and no others had crossed them. Hatfield himself declared that they were those of his own horses, before we rode into the water—he swore to it—I heard him myself. He must have been mistaken though. We didn't search long on the other bank, but threw our torches away, and spurred on after the supposed thieves, as fast as our tired nags could carry us."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Barker.

"We only stopped once in the night—at a farm-house—to rest our beasts, and take a bite ourselves. Here we heard that a man had ridden by with horses, and at a pretty sharp pace. The farmer had, of course, only heard the tramp of the hoofs, and hadn't seen the animals; but he assured us that we would soon overtake him, if that was our object, for it was only half an hour since he had passed by. 'My poor horses!' groaned Hatfield; 'how the scoundrel will ride them! But God be gracious to him when I catch him!—on this rope here'—he carried the rope about his body—'he shall breathe out his thievish soul!' But it was very easy to swear vengeance. About day-break, as we followed fast upon the tracks down a steep hill, we came suddenly upon the man with the horses. He was sitting quietly under a tree, and didn't make the slightest attempt to escape when he saw us approach. I turned to Hatfield in astonishment, but he was staring with open eyes at the animals; and at last, pulling in his own beast with a jerk, he cried; 'Thunder and lightning! those are not my horses.' He was right; there were a pair of grays among them that none of us knew, and the stranger rode his own horse, and was no other than the fellow Johnson, who has been roaming about on the La Fave for some time past, and who, for all I know, lives by hunting."

"Bill Johnson!" exclaimed Brown.

"Hatfield was furious," continued Cook, without heeding this interruption, "especially as—this he told me afterward—he had a bitter grudge against the vagabond, whom he thought capable of any rascality. Yet, there was nothing to be done. We rode up to the horses, but Johnson gave us very short answers; and to the question, what he intended to do with the beasts, he replied, 'I suppose I can do what I like with my own horses.'"

"Reasonable enough, that," cried Barker.

"Hatfield gnashed his teeth in fury, and, though I tried to pacify him, he was too excited, and before long high words were passing between them. Johnson was cool and calm, but kept his hand all the while hid under his waistcoat, where he, of course, had his pistols and knife."

"Naturally," said Barker.

"Hatfield, at last, cursed him roundly, and swore that he would lynch him the first time that he found him on his own land; but Johnson laughed, and said that he would soon have the pleasure of paying him a visit. Finally, I separated them; but it was now in vain to think of looking for the other tracks, for the rain had washed everything away, and we were obliged to give up the pursuit. Hatfield stuck to it that the beasts were still on the settlement, and we searched every nook and corner in the bottom-land that a horse could possibly get into, but it was all useless; they are gone, though in what way is a riddle."

"And which way, too?" queried Barker.

"Well, that is less so; to Texas probably. I must go there one of these days, to get acquainted with the people. If a man finds no old faces among the men, he will at least find horses that he knows."

"And it was on the same evening the squaw was murdered, was it not? Did you hear nothing?" asked Roberts. "You must have ridden close by the place."

"I believe—yes, it seems to me as if one of us said that he heard a cry. It was just as we came to the ford, and it was probably from the poor woman; the distance between the road and the hut is but trifling. Brown, don't you know where the Indian is?"

"No," replied the latter. "Four days after the squaw's burial, he left the neighborhood, or at least he has not been seen here; but I am expecting him back every day, for I can not think that he would leave the country without fulfilling his oath of vengeance."

"But where can he be wandering?"

"Have no fear for him," said Barker; "he is crawling and spying around somewhere, and who knows how soon he'll be here again, and perhaps with news."

"You Regulators couldn't wish a better member than that same Indian."

"Is it true, Brown, that they have chosen you for their leader, in Heathcote's place?" inquired Roberts.

"Hatfield and me," replied the young man; "him on the Petit-Jean, me on the La Fave; but I shall resign the office as soon as my vow is fulfilled, and the murderers of Heathcote and the squaw are discovered and punished. But I hear that Mr. Rawson preaches zealously against the union of the Regulators, as something not merely illegal, but unchristian."

"He has been gone for a week," said Roberts, "as I understand, to the Mississippi, to make various purchases there—in Memphis, I believe—but he was to be back this week; and as Atkins wants to sell his land, which is very good soil, if there wasn't so much swamp—"

"Atkins wants to sell?" asked Mullins. "I haven't heard a syllable about it. Has he found a purchaser?"

"Rawson seems to have a fancy for the place," replied Roberts, "and I have nothing to say against it; for then Marion will not go so far from us, and when she comes Sundays to the new church that we mean to build at the fork of the road—for the timbers have been hewn since Christmas, and I ought to see to the—"

"Gentlemen, move your seats to the table, and please to take up with what we have," cried Brown, interposing, who had, with Cook's help, prepared the simple meal.

"What say you to trying a bit of panther's flesh?" said Roberts, laughing.

"Thank you, I'm much obliged," replied Barker, "I tried it once, and it made me deadly sick."

"Where?" cried Harper, who was in the act of raising a cup of tea to his lips, and now paused in expectation.

"Where? why, in the woods; where else should it be?" replied Barker. "It was on the Washita, and we had hunted the whole day until late in the evening, when I returned, without a hair or hide, to the place where we had agreed to meet."

"You had sprained your foot, I suppose?" said Roberts, winking to Harper.

"Go to the d—!" cried the other, surlily, as he continued—"To the place where we had agreed to meet. They were having fine times there; there was a heap of bones before the fire, and near by it, slung across the branch of a low, wild plum-tree, hung a skinned fawn, as the others called it, declaring that it was of a most delicate flavor. The feet, head, tail, and one of the legs, were missing; and when I asked after them, they said that they had eaten the leg, and had given the rest to the dogs. I wasn't slow in falling to; I cut a good slice from the animal's haunch, and devoured it all alone, for the rascals said that they had had enough. In the very middle of my meal, my dog, who was hungry too, and had been snuffing all about, came close up to me, dragging something in his mouth, as if he would say, 'Look here, see what they have shot!' And what do you think it was?—the head of a young panther. The piece that I was swallowing stuck in my throat, and I looked up and stared at the grinning scoundrels that were sitting around me. But when they couldn't hold in no longer, but broke out into a roar of laughter, I got angry, and was determined to make them think that panther's flesh was a favorite dish of mine. I crammed down the morsel, which stuck on the way and wouldn't go any further, cut off another piece, and asked them, with all coolness imaginable, why they hadn't told me at once that it was panther's flesh, as I should have relished it twice as much. I had lived for a whole month in Tennessee, I said, on nothing but panther's meat, only sometimes of a Sunday I had a wildcat for a change."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the men at this assertion.

"Well, there they sat, with their mouths wide open in astonishment, and one of the party, a young fellow of sixteen, who was right opposite to me, made the most hideous faces, and kept chewing, in his thoughts, upon the morsel I had in my mouth. But this last piece wouldn't go down, the more I worked at it with my teeth, the more it swelled. I stood it for a while. At last, I could hold out no longer. I leaped up—Well, I needn't tell you the rest. Why, Brown, this turkey is delicious; have you shot many this spring?"

"Well, yes," replied the young man, still laughing at the anecdote which he had just

heard, "and they are very fat and nice this year."

"Did you ever eat a rattlesnake?" asked Mullins.

"No, I thank you," said Harper, who was somewhat enlivened, and who felt well and cheerful again, for the first time in many days, "thank you, the creatures have very good looking meat, and it is tender as a chicken's, but then the smell is so disagreeable."

"Only the smell of the body," said Mullins; "the tail is delicious."

"Isn't the poison injurious?" inquired Barker, in amazement.

"Oh, no, not to swallow," replied Brown; "besides, there is no poison in the flesh. The smell is disagreeable, but not injurious; and I am acquainted with a man who ate quite a piece of a horned snake, which, as you know, is thought to be the most poisonous of all, without its harming him in the least."

"Poisonous! I should think so," cried Harper. "I once saw a horned snake in a large oak, and was just going to shoot, when down it came in a rage, and snapped off one of the little sprouts that grew at the foot of the tree; then the thing held still for a moment, and I took off its head with a bullet. The oak died that very month, and the little shoot that the reptile had bitten, turned all black, and even the creeping vines that clambered up around the tree, withered and dropped off."

"That's nothing," said Barker, turning to Harper, "you know what kind of a place Poinsett county is, and especially as to poisonous reptiles. There are hardly more in the Mississippi bottom-lands. Among them you will sometimes, though not often, luckily, come across a horned snake. Two years ago, a German settled there with his family—it is true, he has moved away again; that is, he died, and somehow or another his family couldn't get acclimated—well, at that time, he had a relation, or acquaintance, or something of that sort, living with him, who did the greater part of the work about the house. During the week he always had the fever; and he looked curious enough when he walked out on Sundays, dressed in his best. He then wore a bright yellow vest, with red stripes, an enormous fur hat, short black tight pantaloons, and a blue cloth coat, that reached down to—"

"What is the coat to us?" said Harper, impatiently.

"More than you think," said Barker, with a grave nod, and then continued quietly—"down to his ankles, with a very narrow collar, and very large white linen pockets, which the fellow was always cramming full of mashed peaches, slices of watermelon, and other like vegetables. But the greatest ornament on this coat were the enormous buttons."

"What have the buttons to do with the story?" asked Cook.

"Much—very much," said Barker, with a significant nod; "but listen! This young man, then, went on Sunday, with a large black-bound Bible under his arm, over to a neighbor's, where one of these everlasting prayer-meetings was to be held. Well, close by the narrow foot-path that he followed, he found a small green parrot, that seemed to have just fallen from a tree. He stooped down to pick it up, but, unfortunately, he didn't see the 'horned snake' whose property he wished to appropriate to himself. The reptile at once darted from beneath a yellow leaf, and bit the poor fellow just below the elbow, through his coat. Of course, he died in a few minutes, and his relative, who was walking behind him with his wife, found him lying dead in the path. He got the doctor, but it was too late. They carried him on a sort of barrow to the house; there they took off his coat, and found the little wound, which had already turned perfectly black. That same evening, for it was very warm, the poor fellow was buried, and the blue coat was hung upon a nail near the door. But what do you think happened to the coat that the horned snake had bitten? When the German got up the next morning, the sleeve that the poison had touched was covered with bright streaks; toward noon, the seams turned a light blue, and came apart in some places; the right sleeve, however, got to be of a handsome black color, with a tinge of red. During the afternoon, the buttons dropped off one by one, the button-holes gave way, the pockets and the lining swelled up, and toward night the loop broke; it fell down, and began to smell."

"Why, Barker!" cried Harper, in dismay.

"Began to smell, I say; they had to get it out of the house and bury it," continued Barker, with imperturbable gravity.

"Do you hear him?" exclaimed Harper, getting down his cup, and starting from his seat. "The coat—"

"Mortified and bursted regularly," said the old hunter, with the greatest tranquillity, as he took a piece of tobacco from his pocket, and cut off a large quid, which he thrust coolly into his mouth.

"Boys, we must be off," said Roberts, when the shouts and laughter had somewhat subsided, while Barker, apparently offended at the slight credit given to his narrative, kept his seat stiffly and sullenly upon the block of wood which served him as a stool, and drummed with his fingers upon the table; "at least, I must go," continued Roberts, when he saw that no one but Mullins prepared to accompany him. "My wife is grumbling already, I know; besides, Rawson is to be there this evening, and there are a good many things to be arranged before the wedding. Will you oblige me by riding home with me, Brown? There is a heap of writing to be done; and, although, in my youth, when we had five writing lessons a week, for which the school-master—"

"It is impossible for me to do, Mr. Roberts," said Brown, in some embarrassment; "besides, the Regulators on the La Fave meet at Bowitt's to-morrow morning."

"I thought they were to meet at Smith's," said Roberts.

"Mr. Rawson has been so long preaching to him that such an association was sinful, that he has quit it," replied Brown, smiling; "but that is a matter of no consequence. Bowitt doesn't live far from him; we are all almost equally distant from his house, and then he is a warm advocate of our cause."

"Nothing further has been discovered, then, concerning Heathcote's murder?"

"Nothing. You know that immediately after the deed general suspicion fell upon me, and it was even resolved upon that I should be arrested a day or two after the murder of Alapaha; but this was given up for want of evidence, and as, besides, I could prove by Haswell, who accompanied me a ways that morning, that I did not wear boots, but moccasins—although I had a pair of boots, like those which made those tracks, in my saddle-bags. With this all suspicion ceased, for the only person in the whole neighborhood who wears such boots is Mr. Rawson, and no one could presume to suspect him."

Roberts looked up in astonishment. "And still," he said, in a low voice to himself, "the murdered man suspected him. He never could bear the preacher."

"Unfortunately, it has rained a little almost every morning this spring," continued Brown, "and the tracks were soon washed out. No one recognizes the little knife that we found near the body."

"A penknife," muttered Roberts to himself.

"But we have not yet given up all hope; although we have appeared idle for some time past, yet we have, in truth, been active enough, and suspicion is falling here and there upon certain people, whom I, for my part, would never have suspected."

"What has become of the man that was overtaken with the horses that night?"

"Johnson?" returned Cook. "They say he has been seen here again, but whether to stop in these parts, or whether he was merely riding through, I don't know."

"Brown, you could do me a favor when you ride into the settlement," said Roberts; "when do you start?"

"In about half an hour. I intended to pass the night at Wilson's."

"Good! Then you will reach Atkins's early in the morning; and I wish you would ask him to remain at home next Monday, as Rawson and I mean to ride over to look at the farm. May I depend upon you?"

Brown promised not to forget the commission; Roberts then drew on his clothes, which were now completely dry, and soon left the hut to ride home, accompanied by Mullins.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALMOST three weeks had elapsed since the evening on which Brown and Marion had bid each other farewell. He had sworn never to see her again, and he had faithfully kept his vow; but what he had suffered during this in-

terval, how he had wrestled with his heart, none knew but he; and his face had grown pale, and his eyes had lost their former vivacity and luster. Nothing would have induced him to remain longer in a place where he was so soon to witness the sacrifice of a being at whose side he would have found a life replete with happiness and delight. Before going, however, he wished at least to see his good name restored in the eyes of the world, that no stain might cleave to it—that no venomous tongue might soil it with calumnious rumors. Marion, he was convinced, did not deem him capable of such a crime, but his friends also must be satisfied of his innocence; for, much as they were attached to him, the greater part of them considered him guilty of the murder, although they justified it. When mention was made of the money, they shrugged their shoulders and said: "It could have done the dead man no good to have thrown the money into the river with him."

He was resolved to discover and punish the criminal, and to avenge the death of Alapaha. Then he would leave a land where nothing but pain and grief was henceforth reserved for him.

And what were Marion's feelings toward the friend whom she knew to be so near, and still, alas, so distant? The heart of woman is strong, and breaks only with the keenest suffering; but the young girl felt that she was doing her duty, and in this thought she found some solace to her woe. Rawson had received her promise; it is true when she gave it she did not then know the man at the first sight of whom she was destined to learn the meaning and import of the word "love," but it had been given freely, without constraint, and she could not withdraw it. And how could she answer it to her God, if she were to break the heart of one man, and this one her plighted bridegroom, to render another happy? Had not Rawson, with his soft and musical voice, lately said to her that his earthly happiness was to be found with her alone? that the sight of her countenance was to him what air and sunshine were to the plant? that her presence diffused a calm and holy glow through his soul, and that he should despair were he to lose her now?

Alas! on that night the poor girl bedewed her pillow with scalding tears; no eye beheld them, but her anxious and harassed soul found comfort, and consolation, and courage, in prayer, and she awoke on the following morning firm and composed. Rawson had passed the night in their dwelling; and on the next day she told her mother, amid tears and sobs, and with a faltering voice, that she was ready to unite herself forever with the man whom her parents had chosen for her, as soon as they thought it best. Her delighted mother clasped her to her bosom, and her father kissed her upon the forehead, and said:

"Take him, if you think you can be happy with him. May you be happy as you deserve to be!"

Since then, Rawson had gone to Memphis, and was expected back almost every hour.

It was again Friday, exactly fourteen days after the fearful evening on which the poor squaw fell beneath the hands of the cowardly assassin. The sun stood high above the green, waving tops of the noble group of trees which grew, crowded closely together, near the border of the little field, as if firmly resolved to resist all further inroads from the hand of man. Life and animation, in the meanwhile, prevailed in and around old Roberts's dwelling. Marion, with a small basket upon her arm, was standing amid a fluttering, crackling brood of chickens, and strewing the yellow corn over the clean yard; while, on the other side of the low fence, a litter of grunting pigs were seeking in vain for admission, that they might share in the abundant meal. Her mother was sitting near, gazing with a smile at the busy scene, when Marion suddenly uttered a low cry, and dropped from her hands the now-empty basket which she was about to take into the house.

Mr. Rawson was standing near the fence, and now greeted her with a friendly, smiling mien. He had completed his business, and had come to claim his bride.

"What's the matter?" cried her mother, startled for a moment by her exclamation; then, however, following her daughter's glance, she perceived her long and eagerly expected son-in-law, and said, reaching him her hand: "Well, this is handsome, Mr. Rawson—very handsome in you, to return so soon; we have been anxiously expecting you."

"And Marion, likewise?" asked the preacher, smiling, as he stepped over the low fence, clasped the hand of the blushing maiden, and pressed it gently to his lips—"and Marion, likewise?"

"I am very glad to see you well and hearty again," replied the young girl, in a whisper. "You know that you are always welcome here."

"In your house—but in your heart also, Marion?" asked Rawson, urgently. The maiden trembled, and was silent. "Marion," continued the preacher, after a short pause, "the blessing of Heaven has attended me in my journey: I have now enough of worldly lucre to be able to settle here in a condition suitable to our moderate station. Marion, will you be mine—will you on the next Sabbath, the day of the Lord, become my wife?"

"Yes," answered her mother, with emotion, as she drew the trembling, speechless child to her bosom—"yes, worthy sir; she has already confessed to me that her heart is yours, and I am sure that you will render her happy."

"All that stands in my power, in the power of a poor, sinful mortal," replied the preacher, raising his eyes devoutly toward Heaven, "I will do; and I think that Marion is convinced of this. May I not hope it, at least?"

The lovely girl gave him her hand in silence, which he pressed once more to his lips, while Marion sobbed aloud upon her mother's bosom.

"Well, Mr. Rawson," said old Roberts, who at this moment appeared at the fence, "you have kept your word, then? How stands the business?"

"Excellently, Mr. Roberts," replied the preacher, joyfully, "even better than I had expected; and I have come to beg for your blessing upon our union on the ensuing Sabbath."

"But won't that be too much in a hurry for the girl?" asked Roberts, as he gave his horse to a negro-boy, and, stepping over the fence, approached them.

"She has consented," interposed her mother, "and we need but little preparation here in the woods. But, Mr. Rawson, what kind of order is your house in?"

"I would entreat you both to examine it this morning, if you can spare the time," replied the preacher. "It is small and humble, indeed, but I shall probably come to terms with Atkins this week, and purchase his; then we can move around a little more at our ease."

"But wouldn't it be better to defer the wedding until you have done so?" inquired Roberts. "It would save a great deal of time and trouble; and then Marion, I am sure, would prefer moving at once to a snug little farm, than staying awhile in a log-hut."

"That can not be denied," replied Rawson, "but it is still uncertain when Atkins leaves the settlement—it may be four or five weeks yet; and, my dear Mr. Roberts, you can not blame me if, now that so many obstacles are removed, I should be impatient to call Marion my wife."

"Well, then," responded the old man, "take her; and may you be happy together!"

"Thanks! my best thanks!" cried Rawson, grasping his hand with emotion. "Marion shall never regret having intrusted her future fate in my hands. But now, farewell, my dear parents—permit me to call you so already—and soon—"

"But won't you spend the evening here?" asked Mrs. Roberts. "You have been so long—and it really isn't quite right to leave Marion always alone."

"The time is short, my good Mrs. Roberts," replied Rawson, sighing; "and here in our settlement, where the neighbors live so far apart, a day passes very quickly, in accomplishing very little. But I hope to have everything arranged by to-morrow night; and I can then, at least, spend the last evening in your company, and the company of my bride."

"Very well, very well, Mr. Rawson," said the old man, "that's all right; you have been from home now a week, and of course there is a good deal to be attended to. To-morrow evening then, we shall see you again. By-the-by, we go to Atkins's on Monday, I suppose?"

"Certainly," answered the preacher.

"Very well, then," continued Roberts. "I asked Brown this evening to give him notice; he will pass there early in the morning, on his way to the meeting of the Regulators, that's to be held at Bowitt's."

"I was told that the Regulators had disbanded," replied Rawson, somewhat more

warmly than was consistent with his usual grave demeanor; "at least I was so informed on my journey."

"Oh, no, they are just getting to be in earnest. They suspect several persons in the neighborhood, as I hear, and they are to consult together to-morrow as to what is to be done; for the times are dangerous."

"Would it not be possible to be present at this meeting?" asked Rawson, interrupting him.

"Why not?" answered Roberts, laughing. "But then you must become a Regulator, and thus far I know you have spoken very warmly against them."

"The Regulators need a man," rejoined Rawson, hastily composing himself, "who might at times restrain them in their too-violent zeal, and keep them from excesses, such as those they ran into in White county, for example. With this intent, I should not consider it incompatible with my station to join them."

Roberts gazed inquisitively upon him, and Rawson continued, slightly blushing:

"You think that I have changed my opinion in so short a time? No, in truth, I still hold the union of the Regulators as improper—because it is illegal—"

"Well?" said Roberts, as the other hesitated.

"Why, can't you understand?" cried Mrs. Roberts, half-angrily; "the worthy man is perfectly right. The folks tear and rage through the country, like so many wild Indians. I don't think they mean wrong—they think they're doing right, and often commit the most barbarous outrages."

"None are received into the band," said Roberts, gazing steadfastly at the preacher, while the latter often cast down his eyes, which at last fairly met his own, "who will not take an active part in their proceedings. I do not think they will listen to a counselor, even if they need one."

"There would be no harm in trying," replied Rawson, who had now entirely regained his composure. "I will stop at Bowitt's to-morrow, if it is in my power, and I will not leave unless they compel me. I shall then have done my duty in the matter; even God requires no more."

"Well said!" rejoined Roberts, shaking him warmly by the hand—"well said! I like to see a man remain true to his principles."

"Who is their leader now?"

"Brown—that is, on the La Fave."

"He, at least, has not remained true to his principles," replied the preacher, glancing upon the old man. "I remember perfectly well the words which he uttered here, on this very spot, with reference to this association."

"That's a different case," returned the old farmer, earnestly. "Brown found himself compelled, as one may say, to take an active part in this society, for his own good name was implicated. He was openly accused of murder, and his sole intent at present is to discover the actual murderer of Heathcote, with whom he had had a quarrel, for Heathcote was always rather—"

"I thought the chief aim of the Regulators was confined to the discovery of the horse-thieves," interrupted Rawson, turning slightly pale.

"Only in part; but if you are present at the assembly to-morrow, you will hear all. The point now is, so far as I have learned, to take hold of some fellows they suspect, in hopes at least of discovering traces of the culprits, even if they should not prove to be the right ones."

"If they could only discover the murderer of the poor squaw!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts. "Oh, Mr. Rawson, you can't think how often I have prayed for it! The woman was so good and pious, and looked up to you with such veneration! Oh, how often have I seen her weep while you were preaching, as if her heart would break!—and now, to die so young—to die in such a frightful way!"

"Yes, it is frightful!" replied Rawson, deeply agitated, though from a very different cause. "But, my worthy friends, I must be gone. Good-night! good-night, Marion!—where is the maiden?"

"Marion, child, come out here!" cried her mother. "Mr. Rawson wants to bid you good—"

"Leave her in peace, my honored friend," said the preacher, interposing; "her heart is full, and she will hold communion with her

God. To-morrow I hope to find her cheerful and happy."

With these words he waved his hand to the two in farewell, mounted his horse, and was soon lost to view in the adjacent forest.

"Mother, what is the matter with the girl?" asked Roberts, when the preacher had departed; "she seems to act very strangely. I hope she isn't forced to marry this Mr. Rawson."

"Foolish man! who would force her?" replied the good dame, smiling; "she is still half a child, the silly thing, and it's hard for her, I suppose, to leave her parents. But hand in hand with this holy man—"

"Yes, yes, very well!" interrupted Roberts, unbuckling his spurs, and hanging them without the house under a little porch, near the saddle and bridle; "very well! I've heard that often enough—"

"You have no liking for the pious man?"

"No, I haven't. I can't see why our child is to be so much happier with him than with anybody else. A brave and honest lad, with a good heart, that was something more of a man, would, to speak candidly, suit me just as well—perhaps better; but, as Heaven pleases. You women have arranged it, and I have nothing further to do, except to say 'yes.' He has something to commence a little farm with, and with that an industrious man can't help getting along in Arkansas."

Rawson's assumed frankness had entirely gained the old man's good will again; for, perfectly honest and upright himself, he was not very ready to attribute evil to another; why then to Mr. Rawson, who was known in the whole settlement as a devout and God-fearing man. If, at times, a dark suspicion crossed his brain, he either was unable to grasp it definitely, or he at once banished it as false and foolish.

But what, in the meanwhile, were the emotions of the preacher, as he rode slowly and thoughtfully through the dark and shadowy wood. When he had reached such a distance from the house that he could not be seen nor watched, he dismounted, took his horse by the bridle, and walked gravely and sunk in deep reflection along the narrow path which wound its way through the forest, avoiding all hindrances, such as large trees and spots of marshy ground. At last he stopped, and said in a low voice, gazing upon the earth before him:

"It's getting almost too warm for me here in Arkansas—the d—l may thrust his finger in the pie, and by some accident—there are strange examples of it—bring things to light that wouldn't be exactly beneficial to my good name in this part of the country. I must be off, and that as soon as possible. Atkins may sell his farm to anybody he likes; I will not bind myself here to be exposed alone to the fury of those yelping hounds, when the rest are out of harm's way—no, no! It's true the Indian has disappeared," he continued, after a while, "and without him they would find it hard to discover anything. I don't see, in fact, how they possibly could without his help—my penknife—"

His horse now pricked up its ears, and as the preacher raised his eyes, he beheld the Indian standing before him.

"Good-day, Mr. Rawson," he said softly, as he stepped from the thicket, and passed him with a slight salutation.

"Assowaum!" cried Rawson, and he felt that he turned deadly pale—"Assowaum—where—where have you been so long? We have missed you in the settlement."

"The pale man has been gone too," replied the Indian, with a smile, and fixing his eyes steadfastly upon the preacher. "Assowaum returns to the grave of his wife."

"And have you discovered no traces of the murderer?"

"No!" replied the savage, speaking scarce audibly, "not yet! The Great Spirit has forbidden the sacred bird to whisper the name of the wretch in Assowaum's ear. Assowaum has spoken with the spirit of his people, in a spot which has never been trodden by the foot of a white man. He now waits for the voice of his Manitou."

"May it be favorable to you," said the preacher, entirely forgetting his usual abhorrence for the Indian's idolatry. The latter passed onward; Rawson leaped into the saddle, and, when a turn in the road concealed him from the eyes of the red-man, he plunged the spurs in his horse's flanks, and sped along the way, while his long brown hair fluttered in the cool evening wind, and his horse, unac-

customed to such treatment, snorted and foamed as it dashed through the low bottom-land with its impatient rider.

CHAPTER IX.

ROBERTS had not been long gone from Harper's but, when Brown likewise prepared to ride up into that part of the settlement where Bowitt lived, and where the Regulators were to hold their meeting on the following morning. Cook accompanied him for a ways, then turned to the left, however, in order to reach his own house, and follow on at day-break. Barker, meanwhile, remained with the convalescent invalid, who swore long and loud that this should be the last day he would allow himself to be penned up in this style.

"I must feel leaves and moss under my feet again," he cried. "I must see the green branches above me before I shall get well." It was agreed, therefore, that, on the following day, he should ride home with Barker, and spend a week with him; but, as the distance was too great for a man exhausted by fever, the two resolved to pass the first night at Roberts's, who had long since invited them.

In the mean while Brown rode onward along the narrow path, which was covered with leaves, and which could be followed only by remarking the strips of bark that had been peeled from the trees, and in about an hour and a half reached Wilson's little farm, whom he found upon the point of mounting his horse.

"Halloo, Wilson! which way now? To the meeting of the Regulators?" cried Brown, as he approached him.

"Yes," said the young man, blushing, as he tugged desperately at the saddle-girth, which was already drawn almost to bursting.

"What are you doing, Wilson?" cried Brown, who remarked it; "you're squeezing the life out of the poor beast's body. You are not going to run a race that you look so sharply after the girth?"

"No, not quite," replied the other. "Which way are you riding?"

"I was coming to your house; which way are you going?"

"Why, I thought of going to Atkins's."

"Well, that will answer; I'll pay you a visit another time, and will pass this evening at Atkins's. Besides, I have an errand to do there for Roberts."

Wilson was about to object, but Brown did not heed him, or, perhaps, did not hear him, for he called to his friend to mount, and then turned his horse's head toward Atkins's dwelling.

Wilson was soon at his side, and at last said, probably only to break the silence: "You have an errand then for Atkins; from Rawson, I suppose? He wants to buy Atkins's farm, they say—that is, if Atkins really removes."

"Isn't that settled yet?"

"Who can say? the old fellow is dark and close as the grave; he has said nothing about it to me."

"Why to you more than to anybody else?" inquired Brown, smiling, while Wilson began, suddenly, to whistle a tune, and beat his leggings with a switch which he had broken from the bushes. He seemed inclined, indeed, to leave this question unanswered until Brown repeated it; then, however, he reined in his horse, reached the young man his hand, as the latter stopped near him, and said, with a hearty tone and glance:

"You shall hear my story, Brown; it's told in a few words, and—you mean well by me—perhaps, you can give me advice."

"Well, let us hear," replied his friend; "perhaps, and perhaps not. It isn't often that I am asked for advice—above all, in love matters," he added, with a smile, as he saw the blood mount to Wilson's cheeks and brow.

"Well, you are right," replied the other, at last, almost in a whisper; "it is a love-matter, but—not a fortunate one. Are you acquainted at Atkins's?"

"I never was in his house."

"He has a child—an adopted orphan—a young girl—there you're laughing at me, but you don't know how I feel when I speak of her; yes, I know; I see you are trying to hide it, but you're laughing. Well, I won't describe her to you.—I have loved the girl for the last year, ever since she came with Atkins to the La Fave, and he won't give his consent. It's true, she's only his foster-daughter, but he has raised her, and made an excellent girl of her—no thanks to his wife, though—and now he wants to make her marry a man she doesn't

like, and won't have on any condition; but he is perpetually quarreling with her about it."

"That's a shame!" said Brown; "how old is she?"

"Ah, only just seventeen!" said Wilson, with a sigh; "if she were twenty-one, we needn't ask the old man's consent."

"Does she love you?"

"She has told me so more than a thousand times."

"Well, where's the great trouble? Her foster-parents will yield in time," said Brown, in a tone of encouragement.

"Yes, if we only had time!" cried Wilson, impatiently. "Rawson is to be married day after to-morrow, and Ellen is to go over to help the young pair set the house in order."

"Day after to-morrow?" said Brown, turning pale.

"Yes, in the afternoon," continued Wilson, without remarking Brown's emotion. "If Atkins sells out, then he means to go to Texas, and Ellen will have to go with him."

"Well, and do you go too," returned Brown, who scarcely heard what his friend said.

"That can't be," replied the latter. "I have an old mother living in Tennessee, not far from Memphis, and I should have to take her first, for she's living with strangers, and I don't mean she shall die there."

"Then I can do but little to assist you," replied Brown, with an abstracted air. "I am not acquainted with Atkins; I have only seen him once, and it is very improbable that my intercession would have the slightest weight with him."

"I do not wish you to intercede with Atkins, but with some one else."

"And with whom?"

"With Mrs. Rawson. You are well acquainted with Roberts, and Marion thinks a great deal of you—I know that; if you would beg her to intercede for me, I am sure she would do it to please you."

"Mrs. Rawson," said Brown, softly, and as if sunk in deep thought. "Mrs. Rawson—can she help you?"

"Oh, she has great influence in Atkins's family," cried Wilson. "When Mrs. Atkins lay so long dangerously sick last summer, she and Ellen watched for weeks at her bedside; they will do anything for her, she is so good."

"Yes, yes," said Brown, sighing heavily.

"You think so too, then, do you?"

"What?"

"That they will do anything for her."

"My dear Wilson," added Brown, half turning from his companion, "you could apply to a better person in this business than me. Rawson would perhaps be a more effectual advocate."

"Yes," replied Wilson, moodily, "I know that; but d—n me if I can bear the man. The whole neighborhood like him; the women, at least, are possessed about him; but I don't know how it is, I always feel uncomfortable, when I try to be friendly with him. And, then, his position is a very singular one. A year ago he comes here, says himself that he is poor, doesn't do the least work, only preaches, and doesn't get a cent for that, yet he is never without money; rides around for twelve months in the country in this way, and all at once marries the prettiest girl on the La Fave—Ellen excepted, for I don't know which I like best. I've nothing against Rawson myself—for it's no business of mine if he is a coward—but I couldn't ask him for a favor, if the whole happiness of my life depended upon it."

"Have patience, Wilson," rejoined Brown; "if the girl loves you, and has given her promise to no other man, all will turn out well. You have many friends here; you are young and industrious—what would you have more?"

"The girl, Brown," said Wilson, warmly. "And finely as you preach, you look to me just as if you had a world of sorrow in your heart, and wouldn't trust a word of it to a living man. I can't keep so quiet; my fate will be decided before Atkins goes, and if no one of you will or can help me to get her peaceably, why, the deuce take me, if I don't run off with her."

"Have you asked Atkins for her?"

"Yes, and she—the old woman—the cross and ill-natured creature, threatened to turn me out of doors, if I showed my face there again."

"And you are going there now?"

"Certainly; but not to the house," said Wilson, laughing. "I'm not so stupid; no, Ellen

washes to-day down by the brook, a couple of hundred paces from the house in the bush; and, as it's almost the only time that I can chat with her undisturbed, I intended, at least, to take advantage of the chance, and when she has finished her work, to ride across to Bowitt's. The weather is warm and fine."

"Can't I get a sight of your sweetheart, that I may, at least, see what sort of a taste you have?" said Brown, smiling.

"To be sure," cried Wilson, joyfully; "she will please you. I have no cause to be ashamed of her. But come, then, we are not far from the place; we must turn off here to the right, or they will see us from the house. Stop, leave your horse here, for we can't ride through the slue, and there is nothing but an old dry cypress thrown across for a bridge. I shall take mine down into the canebrake—that's his usual place."

"Sol" he said, when he had returned, and was now guiding his companion across the narrow bridge—"so, there she is; but, softly! let's take her by surprise."

The two now advanced on tiptoe toward an open spot in the wood, which was situated in the bend of the brook, that bore its waters in a thousand windings to the neighboring La Fave. When here, they paused, actually surprised at the charming spectacle that met their eyes, while Wilson cast a triumphant glance upon his friend, as if to say, "You see I was right! Is that a creature for Texas, and shall I suffer this sweet flower to escape me?"

Close to the pebbly bank, suspended from a stick that was supported by two low, wooden prongs, hung a large black kettle over a small but brisk fire. A number of small benches stood around in a half-circle, upon which lay the various articles to be washed, in separate piles, colored and white; while before a rude, wooden bench, stood Ellen, Wilson's sweetheart, rubbing upon the broad washing-board the single pieces which she took successively from a tub near by, and accompanying the uniform movement with the sound of her clear, sweet voice. This, however, was not her sole employment. Close at hand, suspended between two slender hickory-trees, hung a small hammock, woven of the bark of the papaw-tree, in which a bright and rosy-cheeked infant had, thus far, slumbered quietly, rocked by the gentle south wind. Now, however, it unclosed its large, dark eyes, looked upward, and then, instead of smiling at the lovely scene around, it drew its little face awry, an infallible sign of an approaching storm. But Ellen had not forgotten the little sleeper. Scarcely had she remarked that the child was on the point of waking, when she dropped the washboard, imparted a somewhat livelier movement to the hammock, and with a soft and soothing voice sung a lullaby to the child, which was at once calmed by her presence. The men listened in silence; and Ellen, not suspecting their approach, continued her song—at times bending gayly over the now-smiling infant, as if to kiss it—at times starting back, as if to tease and disappoint it; but, before she had ended the last verse, Wilson advanced softly, and cast his arm about her waist.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed in terror, "you wicked man, how you frightened me!"

"Don't be angry, dear Ellen," replied Wilson, as he pressed a kiss upon the lips of the feebly-resisting girl. "But look! I have brought a friend with me."

Ellen turned quickly, and as her glance met that of the handsome and smiling stranger, who must have seen what had just occurred, her face and neck were suffused with crimson, and she turned to hasten from the spot; but Wilson caught her by the hand, and said in a tone of entreaty:

"Ellen, it's a friend, and he knows that we love one another. Besides," he continued, smiling, "you can't go and leave that little rogue in the hammock; and then I'm sure, you would rather stay. Am I right or wrong?"

"Wrong!" whispered the sweet girl, with a smile, as she courtesied, still blushing deeply, to the stranger—"wrong; you know you are always to be wrong."

"Fine laws, indeed!" said Wilson, with a gravely-comic face, to Brown—"very fine laws; the Regulators' laws are nothing to them."

"The hateful Regulators!" cried Ellen.

"Stop, there!" said Wilson, interrupting her; "not so hasty, miss. Here are two—"

"You!"

"Why, yes; this is our leader, and I—"

"Oh, I am sure you are not a Regulator," said Ellen, turning to Brown, and addressing him in a half-anxious, half-persuasive tone; "I can not believe it."

"You have a very terrible opinion of these men, then?" answered Brown, smiling.

"Ah, yes; father and mother have told me frightful things of them—how they drag innocent men out of their beds at night, and then tie them to a tree, and whip them to death. Father has sworn to shoot down the first man who crosses his threshold with a hostile purpose."

"They are not so bad as your father thinks," said Brown; "and although—"

"I beg you to let me put in a word," cried Wilson, stepping between them. "I didn't come here to listen to a lecture about the Regulators. Ellen, have you spoken with your mother again?"

"Yes," replied the poor girl, and her head drooped sadly upon her bosom; "but she says—"

"You need not mind Mr. Brown, he knows all," cried Wilson, as he remarked that Ellen cast a timid side-glance at his friend.

"It is useless to make a secret of it," said Ellen, sighing heavily; "the whole settlement will soon know it. She says that I must marry that hateful Cotton."

"Cotton!" exclaimed Brown, in astonishment.

"Yes, alas! It is true mother has strictly forbidden me to mention his name to any one; but why should I not? I will die rather than marry that man."

"You shall not marry him!" said Wilson, fiercely. "May I be d— but I mustn't do that," he added, checking himself, as Ellen cast a reproving glance upon him; "but I know what I will do: when we have once discovered this band of thieves that infest this part of the country—that is to say, if Atkins won't listen to reason—the d— the dogs take me—that isn't swearing—if I don't play some wicked trick—I'll run off with you!"

"And you call that a wicked trick!" replied Ellen, smiling, and shaking her finger at him with a mischievous air.

"Oh, you know what I mean," cried Wilson. "But what's the matter with you, Brown? you are looking so thoughtfully at the tops of the trees—"

"Have you seen the man whom you call Cotton, lately?" asked Brown, turning to the young girl, without heeding Wilson's remark.

"Yes," replied Ellen, "he returned about four days since from the Mississippi, I believe, where he had gone two weeks ago; but he never comes except in the evening, and I can't bear his gloomy, hateful way. Do you know him?"

"I believe so, but I am not exactly sure. Does he come—but what is Wilson about?"

Brown had every reason, in truth, to look upon the movements of the latter with surprise; for he suddenly stooped, glided like a snake toward the thicket, and in a few seconds had disappeared. The cause of this singular retreat, however, did not long remain a riddle; for, almost at the same moment, the stately and still youthful form of Mrs. Atkins was seen approaching along the path that led to the house. Her white and fluttering gown having given Wilson timely warning, he had left to his friend the task of arranging matters with the worthy dame.

"Well, well, miss!" she cried, advancing with hasty strides and head erect—"well, well—company! I haven't heard you washing for a quarter of an hour! Do you expect the linen to wash itself?"

"The child!" stammered Ellen.

"What's that!—the child? It's lying as quiet in its hammock as a little lamb. Nonsense!"

"I must beg you to excuse the young lady on my account," said Brown, stepping forward, and addressing a friendly greeting to the indignant dame. "I have come upon an errand from Mr. Roberts and Mr. Rawson, and intend to pass the night under your roof."

"But this isn't the high-road," replied Mrs. Atkins, already evidently soothed.

"That is true," rejoined Brown, whose chief aim was to protect the poor trembling girl from harsh words, or perhaps even ill-usage—"that is true; but I came a ways through the wood, and I didn't know of the slue; I wasn't sure whether to ride up or down to reach the house; so I crossed the bridge to reconnoiter,

and found the young lady here, whom I interrupted in her occupation for some moments by my questions."

"Young lady? not yet quite; don't put nonsense into the girl's head. But my husband is in the house. Where did you leave your horse? I will send the boy for it."

"Just where the cypress lies across the slue," replied Brown, who now wished to lead the angry woman back to the house again, in order to give Wilson fair play.

"Very well—come, then," said Mrs. Atkins. "And you, miss, be more industrious; not half of the things washed yet—it's scandalous!—and you have been here these two hours. See that you are through by dark! And how is baby?" she continued, with a tone of truly maternal tenderness, as she bent over the child's hovering cradle; "baby likes that—rock, rock, all day—the little rogue!—Mind, Ellen, waste no time!"

Before she turned to depart, she cast a scrutinizing glance at the different footprints, and at Brown's boot; but the ground was so trampled, that it was difficult for an unpracticed eye to discover anything suspicious. Sending a kiss to the infant, she walked, followed by Brown, to the house, which stood on the verge of a large, open field.

CHAPTER X.

ATKINS'S house differed, and advantageously, from the greater number of the log-huts of the settlement, although it was constructed of the same materials. The logs, which were smoothly hewn, both within and without the dwelling, formed two perfectly similar buildings, a story and a half in height, which were separated by a sort of covered court or porch that was open toward the north and south, the whole being sheltered by a single roof. The interior of the dwelling also bore witness to the farmer's industry. The nicely-planed boards, which were carefully nailed before each interstice between the logs, were covered with gigantic placards, left behind by traveling circus-riders and showmen, proprietors of menageries, and of museums of wax-figures, among which specimens of art one was particularly to be distinguished. It represented, on faded, yellow paper, a man in very tight pantaloons, and with two uncommonly tall feathers in his cap, lying in the arms of a lion, and apparently whispering something very interesting in the animal's ear.

The main and almost the sole apartment of one of these two similar buildings was used chiefly as a sleeping-chamber; and five beds, with a quantity of mattresses and quilted coverlets, sufficient to serve perhaps for a dozen guests, stood around the room; while along the walls hung the dresses of the women, and, in a very particular corner, the Sunday apparel of the proprietor. Visitors were not usually introduced into this chamber until bedtime, when the various couches stood all prepared, and ready to receive the wearied limbs of the strangers. During the day it was an impenetrable sanctuary to all but the members of the family.

Brown was now led to the other building, and introduced into the sitting-room, where he found his host, who, balancing himself on the hind legs of his chair, and plunged in deep thought, was humming a tune, and whittling a piece of cedar with a broken penknife. The entrance of a visitor aroused him from his contemplations; but he had scarcely looked toward him, and recognized the new-comer, when, suddenly turning pale, he leaped from his seat, and glanced wildly at a long rifle that lay reposing upon two wooden pegs which projected from the wall above the door. This alarm was not dissipated until he saw his visitor was alone, and until he was convinced that he entered his dwelling with no hostile intentions.

"Mr. Atkins," said Brown, somewhat confused at the farmer's singular alarm; feigning, however, not to perceive it, he advanced, and reached him his hand, with a frank and friendly air—"I am sorry if I have disturbed you," he added.

"Oh—no—not in the least," stammered the farmer, who had not yet recovered his composure; "it was only—I thought—"

"Of course, you had no idea of seeing me. I have lived so retired, that I am, in fact, almost a stranger here; yet the state of the times will, I hope, be my excuse, if I have come at an unwelcome moment."

"My dear Mr. Brown," said Atkins, who

had now entirely collected himself, "don't mention anything of the sort. It is true you have been long in coming; but, nevertheless, you are welcome, and I hope that this visit may lead to our better acquaintance."

"I hope so," replied Brown, shaking the hand which Atkins offered him, "and it is possible that we may continue it in a foreign land. I have heard, at least, that you talk of moving to Texas."

"Yes—but do you think of it too? If I am not mistaken, I was told, last week, that you—you had joined the Regulators—had even been chosen their leader."

"Yes and no," replied Brown, smiling. "I have joined them, indeed, and am, for the moment, their leader; but it is only conditionally—only until the authors of the two murders, which have lately been committed here, are discovered and punished. Then I shall throw up my office, and leave the State, to become a citizen of the republic of Texas."

"But the horse-thieves?" cried Atkins.

"Interest me only, inasmuch as I suspect some of their number to be the murderers. Of course, so long as I stand at the head of the Regulators, I shall act against them with all zeal, if we should chance to light upon their traces; but these appear to be so carefully concealed that we can scarcely hope to discover them; therefore, I shall not trouble my head about them. I have now but a single object: it is to track out these wretches; and, if we catch them, may the Lord pardon them, for from men they have no pardon to hope."

"It is singular," said Atkins, thoughtfully, "that in both cases suspicion has rested upon no living soul—yes—I know—you were accused of the first murder, although many defended you from the beginning—you had the women, particularly on your side; and then your conduct toward Heathcote, on that morning, so far as I have heard, was by no means such as to show that you feared to meet him in a manly, open fight; you could have had no inducement, therefore, to resort to such a course. Some one must have attacked him merely for the sake of his money. I said so, from the first; and there's no telling what kind of fellows he associated with, or who knew of the money that he carried about him, besides those who live on the La Fave."

"You do not suspect any one in this neighborhood of having committed the deed?"

"To speak the truth, no; for even those," he added, in a somewhat lower tone, and almost as if he were talking to himself, "who in other matters, perhaps, are not over-nice, are incapable, I think, of committing so cold-blooded a murder."

"I hope so," said Brown, sighing, as he rested his arm upon the upper beam of the chimney, and leaned his forehead upon it for support—"I hope so; besides, I expect the Indian back every day, and I am sure he will not return without some news."

"Not without some news?" rejoined Atkins, "so? I know the Indian is good upon a trail, but he let the horse-thieves escape."

"Because he did not follow them," replied Brown. "He was so overcome by his wife's death, that I actually feared for his life. And then he came a day too late, for the thieves had already escaped, and the rain had washed away the tracks."

"A provoking thing, the rain!" said the farmer, smiling, as he rubbed his hands softly and complacently behind his guest's back. "It has washed away many a track, and helped many a knave to get off safe. Last year they stole two fine horses from me."

"You should have acted with more energy against the rascals long ago; they have grown too daring, and now snap away your cattle under your very nose. It is even said that the fellows have an accomplice somewhere here on the river, who provides a safe hiding-place for the stolen horses."

"Who says that?" cried Atkins, starting from his seat.

"It was mentioned at our last meeting," replied Brown, without observing this movement, or changing his position; "and they talk of setting a search on foot, to see if they can discover anything, if these thefts continue to be as frequent as they have been."

"It is not every man that will submit to have his premises searched," replied Atkins, gruffly. "We live in a free country, and if I don't want a man upon my ground, or in my house, I simply say to him, 'March!' and if he refuses, I take my rifle from the pegs."

"But see, Mr. Atkins," replied Brown, turning toward him with a friendly air, "that is the very reason why we Regulators have joined together. For this the laws are too feeble in Arkansas. A man, against whom there is no positive proof, even if he were the greatest rascal on the earth, can remain quiet and undisturbed upon his farm. He has the right to shoot down the man who wishes to enter forcibly into his house. Well! but in this way crime is aided and abetted, and this the people of the country can not suffer. Who can feel that his property is secure, if, in rainy weather, which effaces the tracks, the thieves need only drive the horses home, perhaps, in order to be free from all danger, and if they are not at the same time exposed, to have the community rise in mass against them, drag them from their lurking-places, and punish them as they deserve."

"But for what have we laws, then?" said Atkins, moodily; "for what, if they are too mild?"

"They are not too mild," replied Brown; "but it is impossible to enforce them. I will suppose the case that the culprit is arrested by the sheriff, sentenced by the court, where he is to be confined until he is taken to the State prison?—in one of those small log huts that are built for this purpose, from which his friends can liberate him the very first night!"

Atkins smiled.

"You have had some examples of this in this county, I have heard," continued Brown, without remarking it. "But, if, by great good fortune, they succeed in taking him to the penitentiary in Little Rock, and the State has him under lock and bolt; why, it can't keep him for more than one or, at most, two weeks; for a couple of criminals, who escaped from confinement, are said to have declared that the prison was so badly built, that the sheriff couldn't shut them in as fast as they could find their way out. Of what use is it, then, to obey the laws, and deliver up the criminals, if, when we think them safe and harmless behind bolt and bar, we are to find them in a fortnight among us again, and meddling with our property."

"True," replied Atkins, smiling, "the business has its difficulties. I know that Cotton—"

"Where is Cotton now?" asked Brown, quickly.

"Cotton," rejoined Atkins, hastily collecting himself, and speaking in a tone of wonder—"Cotton! how should I know? the sheriff is at his heels, as I heard lately. What put it into your head to ask the question?"

"They say he has been seen in this part of the country," replied Brown, who was unwilling to mention what Ellen had said to him, lest it should bring the poor girl into trouble, but whose suspicions were at once excited by his host's denial; "he has even been seen upon the high road, I hear."

"Yes, it is very possible," replied Atkins; "many a man rides along this road, without stopping here. The people hereabouts are talkative—"

"What brings me here to-day," said Brown, who wished to lead the conversation to another subject, "is a commission from Mr. Roberts and Mr. Rawson.—Ah, there comes my horse," he cried, interrupting himself, as the mulatto rode the animal to the door, and then leaped from the saddle.

"Remain, I beg you!" cried Atkins, detaining his guest, as he was about to leave the apartment. "Dan will attend to that." He then added, turning to the mulatto; "Lead the horse into the stable, give him a good feed, then lay the saddle and bridle under the porch, and when you have finished, why—" By this time he had stepped from the door, and completed the sentence in a voice so low, that Brown was unable to hear him. The mulatto nodded very significantly, as if he perfectly understood him, led the horse away, and was not seen again during the evening.

"You were speaking of a commission," said Atkins, as he entered the house again.

"Yes," answered Brown, yawning, as if rousing himself from a reverie. "On Monday morning, or Monday noon, Mr. Roberts will be here with—his son-in-law to look at your house and lands, and he wishes you to wait for him, even if he should happen to arrive a little later."

"Good! very good!" replied Atkins, in a friendly tone; "I think we can drive a bargain. They are a couple of honest fellows, and they won't be too hard with a neighbor who

wants to emigrate. The marriage is to take place to-morrow, I hear?"

"Yes," rejoined Brown, almost in a whisper. "I believe—to-morrow."

"You will be present, I suppose?"

"Who?—I? No, I think not. Our meeting will probably last till late in the evening, and then I shall pass the night at Bowitt's."

"What meeting?"

"The meeting of the Regulators. We are to assemble to-morrow at Bowitt's house."

"To-morrow? The business must have been arranged very secretly; I haven't heard a syllable of it."

"Why, of course, the Regulators only are notified. Yet, I wonder," continued Brown, who thought he had found a favorable opportunity to say a word in favor of Wilson—"I wonder that Wilson has said nothing to you about the affair; he was commissioned to notify all in this quarter, and we are far from wishing to make a mystery of our proceedings."

"It's a long time since Mr. Wilson has been in my house," replied Atkins, upon whom the mention of this name appeared to produce an unfavorable impression; "that's the reason, I suppose, that I have heard nothing of it; but it's all one, I am not a Regulator, and have no interest in the meeting. Such companies are forming in Texas, I've heard say."

"Yes," replied Brown, who resolved to venture a new onset; "but Wilson seems to wish to settle in this part of the country for good, and I think you could not have a better neighbor."

"You forget that I can hardly be called a neighbor here," replied Atkins, "as I shall sell out on Monday, perhaps;—but here comes my wife with the tea-things—the days are very short. By-the-by, Mr. Brown, how goes it with your uncle? We were all right sorry to hear that the poor man took the fever so badly, but there is no escaping it, and the healthiest men have it the worst."

Brown was convinced that, for the present, at least, all further attempts to do Wilson a good turn would be in vain, and, besides, Mrs. Atkins now entered the house, and was soon afterward followed by Ellen with the child. He would gladly have chatted for a while with the sweet maiden, but he feared lest this might subject her to unpleasant words. A friendly, grateful, stolen glance, however, told him with sufficient plainness, that she had appreciated his kindness in leading her foster-mother away, and—what was better—had taken advantage of it.

The conversation now turned upon ordinary subjects; the pasturage, hunting, the surveying of land in the neighborhood, and the quarrels which often arose in consequence, among those who dwelt near each other. They spoke also of a murder which had been committed about five days before, on the other bank of the Arkansas, where a cattle-dealer had been shot dead, and robbed of his pocket-book, that was said to have contained about a thousand dollars, and the murderer had not yet been discovered. Then of the election of governor and sheriff, etc., etc., until the gorgeously-colored Yankee clock, that decorated the mantle, struck eight. But, now, the child, who thus far had slept sweetly in its cradle, began to grow uneasy and to cry. Ellen took it from its little bed, and walked softly to and fro in the chamber, humming a song; but it continued to scream violently, became more and more restless, and, before half an hour had passed, it was so ill, that the women, now terribly alarmed, ran back and forth to bring all the remedies, which could possibly be found in the house, to ease the little sufferer's pain.

"All was in vain, however, and the mother in great anxiety, now dispatched a negro-boy, and some workmen—who had been occupied for the last few days in digging out a large canoe for Atkins—in various directions, after the different farmers' wives who were acquainted with the maladies of children, whether they lived far or near, to inform them of the poor creature's condition, and to summon them to the spot with all possible speed.

The mother, in the mean time, gesticulated like a maniac, and overwhelmed poor Ellen with the bitterest reproaches, accusing her of having neglected the child, and even of wishing to see it removed from the world, that she might be relieved from the care of tending it.

In vain the poor girl asserted her innocence, and appealed to the love that she had always shown toward the little creature. It was all to no purpose. With the severest and most

unjust rebukes, the woman bade her hold her tongue, and not open her mouth, if she did not want to learn how they treated obstinate servants.

Brown felt his bosom stir with indignation, and he resolved to make every attempt in his power to aid his friend, and to rescue the maiden from the hands of those by whom she was so shamefully maltreated. He was satisfied, however, that, for the present, every remonstrance would not only prove useless, but would be followed by still more unpleasant consequences for the orphan-girl.

The confusion had now reached its highest pitch; the poor little creature seemed to grow worse each moment. Ellen wept in silence, and the mother, heedless of a stranger's presence, walked up and down in the chamber, wringing her hands, and exclaiming, "that it was a punishment from Heaven which now visited her, in the person of the poor innocent child for all her sins and short-comings."

Suddenly a man's voice was heard without demanding admission, and the dogs, awaked by the noise, began to bark and howl violently. The wind, which throughout the day had blown feebly from the south, had shifted, and, coming from the north-west, shook with violence the leaves and branches of the mighty trees, and, when the door was opened, extinguished the light, which stood upon the table; and, as the fire upon the hearth had almost died away, the apartment was wrapped in sudden darkness.

"Hallo! within there! can I pass the night here?" cried the voice a second time. "The d—l take the dogs—will you shut your mouths?"

"Be quiet, Hector! be quiet, Dick! down with you, ye rascals! can't you let a man speak?" cried Atkins, who had now stepped to the door. "Dismount," he then added, turning to the stranger; "my boy will take care of your horse."

"Will the dogs bite?" asked the stranger, prudently, as he obeyed this invitation, and groped his way over the fence.

"No," said Atkins, "not when I am by. Come this way, and don't fall over that log yonder. Stop! there stands the plow—don't run against it—so—three steps; the lowermost is a little totterish. Ellen, light the candle again."

Ellen had been busy, in the mean while, in lighting a few pine chips, and soon the room was sufficiently illuminated to enable them to see the man, who, at this moment, entered the apartment, laid aside his riding-cloak, and his cap of otter's skin, and then advanced with a friendly greeting to the family, who were seated near the chimney, in the bright light of the now blazing fire. He was a short, thickset man, with sharp gray eyes, long, smooth hair, of a somewhat auburn hue, and a face considerably freckled. He wore a brown woolen hunting-shirt, and leggings of the same material, while a pair of old, long-used saddlebags, which he carried upon his arm and laid near the fire, seemed to contain all that he needed, for a ride through the forest, in so wild a region. As he approached the two men, his glance roamed from one to the other, as if uncertain which of them he should accost as the master of the house.

Mrs. Atkins seemed but little pleased at the entrance of a new guest—an occurrence which promised to increase the confusion that already prevailed—for, with a somewhat angry glance, she took the suffering child in her arms, wrapped it in a blanket, and called to Ellen to follow her with a candle into the other house, and light a fire there immediately. Ellen hastened to obey this command, and there seemed to be every probability that Mrs. Atkins would not make her appearance again during the evening.

"A terrible wind without," said the stranger, after an interval of silence, during which he seemed to have satisfied himself of the identity of his host. "It blows as if it would tear up the trees by the roots."

"Yes, it is a little blowy," answered Atkins, casting a keen glance upon his guest. "Have you come far?"

"Not so very far—from the Mississippi."

"Going further westward?"

"Yes, to Fort Gibson. How far is it to the La Fave?"

"I live on the river," replied Atkins, as his glance met that of the stranger; while Brown, disturbed by the cries of the sick child, and by the entrance of the new-comer, had taken his seat near the fire again, and was amusing

himself with thrusting the long stick, which stood in the chimney-corner, to and fro among the coals.

"You have ridden along the bank of the river for several miles," he said, now joining in the conversation; "but you could not see it, as the canebrake is, perhaps, a quarter of a mile broad, and very thick."

"Well, I thought that the river must be near. Fine sedge there; must yield glorious fodder. Is the pasturage good, about here?"

"Very good," replied Atkins, and again he caught the eye of the stranger, who, after a side-glance at Brown, now looked his host full in the face. Brown ceased his occupation, and, lost in thought, suffered the stick to remain in the fire, and it was soon in a light blaze. He gazed steadfastly at the flame, as if endeavoring to recall to his memory something that had half escaped it.

"I have ridden fast," said the stranger, now interrupting the short silence, "and the wind makes one thirsty. May I beg you for a drink of water?"

"Certainly," replied Atkins, and hastened to the bucket, to bring his guest the desired draught; but Brown, startled by a sudden remembrance, looked around at the latter, and met his glance fastened steadfastly upon himself. He turned at once toward Atkins, however, took the gourd from his hands, and drank a long draught of its contents.

"Hearing this gentleman ask for water, put me in mind that I was thirsty myself," said Brown, who by this time had recovered his calmness, and now, recollecting with the utmost distinctness the conversation in the desolate hut on the Arkansas, was resolved that the two men should not remark that he conceived any suspicion, or divined their relation to each other.

"Stay, gentlemen," exclaimed Atkins, "how can you drink the cold stuff in that way, and with such a storm outside? How if we should first pour down a drop of whisky? Let that go before, and the water afterward can do no harm."

"It will do us all three good, I think," responded the stranger, smacking his lips, while the host stepped to a little cupboard, and brought out a jug with three tin cups.

"Here, Mr. Brown, pour out for yourself," he said, reaching the jug to the young man; "oh, really, now, that is hardly a drop—that's right—the stormier it is without, the more comfortable we should make it within. And now—you, sir; what is your name? My name is Atkins, and this is Mr. Brown."

"My name is Jones," replied the guest, "John Jones, easy to remember, eh? Well, to our better acquaintance, Mr. Atkins!—to our better acquaintance, Mr. Brown!" And, glancing pleasantly at the two men, he raised his cup to his lips. A half-scornful, half-anxious smile played about Atkins's mouth, as he heard the man, who called himself Jones, drink to better acquaintance with the Regulator; but not a gesture, not a look, betrayed his thought, and he merely touched his own to the cups of the other two, while he said, as from the depths of his soul, "May we always remain right good friends!"

Ellen, in the meanwhile, had brought in a bundle of bedding, which she laid upon the floor. To Atkins's question, who asked after the condition of the child, she replied that it seemed to suffer severe pain, although no one could tell what was the matter with it.

"Can they do without you for a quarter of an hour?" asked Atkins.

"I hardly know—Mrs."

"Very well; put the kettle over the fire," he said, interrupting her. "You must make haste, and prepare supper for Mr. Jones here; I will speak to my wife about it."

With these words, he left the chamber; and Ellen hastened to prepare the simple meal of a western farmer, which consisted of nothing more than warm corn-bread, fried ham, hot coffee, with butter, cheese and honey. The two men were in the mean while seated quietly near the fire, Brown watching the slender form of the lovely girl, as with busy haste and skillful hand she arranged the required meal; while Jones, as if lost in deep thought, moved the long stick around in the fire, and knocked the burning coals from the large brands—an occupation which he intermitted only when, with impatient mien, he cast a glance, first at the clock, that stood above his head, and then toward the door through which he expected Atkins to return.

The latter made his appearance at last, and at the same time supper was ready for the belated guest. Ellen's labor was not at an end, however; for at this moment several horses stopped before the door, women's voices were heard, and Mrs. Atkins, crying in shrill tones across the court, directed her to make coffee and toast.

Brown still kept his seat near the fire, buried in thought, with his head leaning against the rude mantle. Atkins, however, lighted a second candle, and said to him in a pleasant tone:

"Mr. Brown, you seem to be tired. Here is a light; if you wish to sleep, I will show you to your bed."

"Oh, stand on no ceremony with me, I beg you!" cried the young man, who saw the bedding which Ellen had brought, lying rolled up in a corner. "I can wait; I am by no means sleepy."

"We have a bed above-stairs," replied Atkins; "there you can sleep undisturbed, and start for Bowitt's in the morning as early as you please. Besides, we shall have a noisy time of it here. I have just heard several of our neighbors stop before the door. The child is worse than I thought."

"Your visitors seem to be ladies."

"Alas!" sighed the farmer, with unfeigned dismay, "God grant that the poor thing may soon recover, or they will talk it to death!—So, then, if—"

"Oh! in that case, I think that I had better retire," replied the young man, laughing. "Good-night, gentlemen! Mr. Jones will come up by-and-by, I suppose?"

"There is only one bed up-stairs. Mr. Jones must try and get along here."

"Oh, no ceremony, for Heaven's sake!" cried the latter, holding out his cup to Ellen, who filled it again from a large, tin coffee-pot. "Good-night, then! If you don't set out too early in the morning, I shall perhaps have the pleasure of your company on the road. But I forget—I don't know in what direction you—"

"Up the river—I shall not start so very early," replied Brown. "So, then, good-night!"

With these words, he nodded a friendly good-night to the maiden, and followed Atkins to the upper story of the building, the floor of which was formed, in truth, only of planks laid crosswise upon the beams. Atkins at once returned with the light; and as long as Ellen remained in the apartment (busied partly in preparing a bed for the guest, partly in clearing away the dishes), he, as well as the stranger, observed a profound silence. At last, when she had finished her task, she placed the light upon the table, took the coffee-pot and a basketful of dishes, and, with a low "Good-night," which was not heard, or at least not returned by either of the two men, she withdrew from the room.

Scarcely had she disappeared, when Atkins rose, blew out the candle, so that the room was now but faintly lighted by the crackling brands, and beckoned to the stranger to follow him.

"Some one has sent you to me?" he whispered, when he had led him to such a distance from the house, that there was no danger of being overheard.

"Yes," replied the stranger. "Your name?"

"Atkins."

"Good!—I bring horses."

"Where are they?"

"In the bend of the brook."

"In the water itself?"

"Why, of course."

"But how did you know the spot? Were you ever in this quarter before?"

"I should think so," replied the other, laughing. "I struck the first blow with the ax here. Carpenter bought the place from me, and you bought it from him."

"It was you, then, who contrived that secret—"

"Enough, enough!" answered Jones, cautiously, interrupting him. "What's the use of naming things, when some one else, in the dark here, might possibly overhear you? I never speak of such matters. Is the gate still at the upper corner of the fence?"

"Oh, yes, where the brook goes by."

"Good! Make preparations, then, to get the beasts under cover. In the mean while, I will go and fetch them."

"Won't you need help?"

"None, until we have them inside the inclosure." And, with these words, the laconic

speaker turned, and was soon lost in the darkness. Atkins, however, went back to the house, walked around it, and then proceeded obliquely across the little court, to a kind of barnyard, in which seven or eight horses were running loose, climbed over the fence that inclosed it, and soon disappeared in the obscurity.

When, on looking through the crevices in the floor, Brown saw the two men leave the house together, his suspicions were confirmed, and he stood for a long while irresolute, whether to follow them, and catch them in the act, or suffer them quietly to complete their midnight task. Alone, unarmed, what could he effect against men who were prepared, doubtless, for surprise, and well provided with weapons? All that he could do would but warn them that they were discovered, and lead them to remove all evidences of their crimes. He remained quietly in his bed, therefore, and pondered upon the events of the past day.

The innocent Ellen could not possibly be privy to their deeds of darkness; otherwise she would not so heedlessly have betrayed the secret of Cotton's presence in the neighborhood, and of his visit to Atkins's house. But where did Cotton harbor? Where was there a hut or a thicket, which could conceal a criminal for so many days, while still not a neighbor had seen the slightest traces of him? It must be near at hand, for he could scarcely venture to go far, especially during the daytime. Where, then, was his lurking-place? Who dwelt in the neighborhood? Wilson? It could not be with him. Davis? He, like himself, belonged to the company of Regulators. Johnson? This was possible, indeed; and here a new source of suspicion was disclosed to him.

The pursuers, on that night, had followed the tracks of Hatfield's horses as far as the northern bank of the La Fave; for Hatfield swore that, at that spot, he remarked the footprints of his own beasts. After crossing the river, however, they had pursued and overtaken Johnson, with several horses, but they found none of Hatfield's among the number.

Johnson and Cotton—some secret connection must exist, then, between these two; but they alone could not have executed this affair. Who were the others, and were they in any way connected with those murders?

Brown's head ached, at last, from long reflection, his thoughts grew confused, the various forms that he had seen melted away in strange and fantastic images, and he dreamed, finally, that he was transformed into the preacher Rawson, that Marion bent over him and kissed him, and called him by the tenderest names, while his heart bled at the thought that he owed these favors to the semblance of his rival, which had been cast upon him by a spell, for his torment. Even these restless dreams now forsook him; his mind, like his body, yielded to the fatigues of the day, and he sunk into a deep and quiet slumber.

CHAPTER XI.

We must now return to the twilight hour of the same evening, and enter a small but tolerably comfortable log-cabin, which stood in the midst of the forest, and which was connected by no road, or none, or least, that was easy to distinguish with the other dwellings of the county. It was the abode of Johnson. He had purchased the place about a year before from a hunter, for twenty dollars in cash, a woolen blanket, and a bowie-knife. On first occupying it, he had commenced clearing a field, but had soon given over the task, however, and had fenced in a small yard only, to keep from his door the swine and cattle that ran wild in the woods, or to prevent a horse that he might wish to have at hand from escaping. Being seldom at home, and as his dwelling lay secluded in the forest, a neighbor rarely found his way into this quarter, and thus the object of the proprietor was fully attained—namely, to live alone and undisturbed.

The only individual with whom he kept up any intercourse in the neighborhood, was Atkins, whose mulatto, intrusted with all his master's secrets, often carried messages back and forth between them. Now, however, the lonely hut was far from offering its usual dreary and desolate aspect; for a bright warm fire was burning upon the hearth, over which was suspended a large iron kettle, while Johnson and Cotton, seated before it on low stools, were engaged in animated conversation, both

awaiting with eagerness for the boiling of the contents of the vessel, which hung over the flame.

"There, Johnson, now the bubbles rise!" said Cotton, at last, in a tone of impatience; "be quick and give me a drink, for I must hurry, or I sha'n't find Atkins home, perhaps."

"Wait a second or two, the drink tastes flat if the water isn't well boiled," replied his companion; "but there—now it begins; reach me your cup—I won't keep you waiting any longer."

"Thunder! that's hot enough," cried the other, as he eagerly raised the tin cup to his lips; "it takes so long to cool in this cursed ware."

"There's no help for that," replied Johnson, laughing. "Glass and crockery are rather scarce with us— But who comes here?"

"Where?" cried Cotton, and with a single leap he sprang half-way up the ladder, which led from the lower part of the house to the upper.

"You needn't stir," said Johnson, who had approached a crevice between the logs, and looked out; "it's only Dan, Atkins's mulatto."

"Well, what the d—l does he want?" cried Cotton, in astonishment, as he returned and took his seat again. "No bad news, I hope."

"Here he is, and can speak for himself," said Johnson, opening the door and admitting their faithful accomplice. "Well, Dan, what brings you?"

"Massa Cotton must stay here," replied the latter, grinning and taking off his hat. "Massa Brown is at massa's, and is going to sleep there."

"Brown! What in Satan's name brings him up here?" cried Cotton, surlily. "I had something important to consult Atkins about."

"The Regulators meet to-morrow at Bowitt's, said the mulatto, spitting out his quid of tobacco into the chimney-corner, and quietly cutting off a fresh one from the piece which, together with a knife, lay upon the small square table that stood close to the bed against the wall.

"The Regulators!—the plague!" cried Cotton, angrily; "if I had my way, the rascals should dance to another tune. But wait, the time will come, if not for all, for some."

"Has your master sent any other message to us?" inquired Johnson.

"No, massa, nothing else; he'll come over himself in the morning."

"Tell him we'll wait for him then—do you hear? Why do you stand gaping there?"

"Massa," said the mulatto, and his ivory teeth were visible from ear to ear, "there's an empty cup."

"Ah, the fellow's thirsty," cried Johnson, laughing; "well, here—drink, and go to the d—l!"

"Thankee, massa!" said Dan, as he poured the hot draught at a swallow down his throat, gave a short nod, and the next moment was dashing at full speed through the thick sassafras bushes, on his way homeward.

"Well," muttered Cotton, and he sunk with an air of satisfaction upon the seat which he had just left, "then I can, at least, make myself comfortable this evening, that's one good thing. Brown!—the Regulators!—p'ison and rattlesnakes! But let them—"

His speech was cut short by the distinct tramp of a horse's hoofs, and with a bound he stood upon the ladder, now, however, with the full cup in his hand, in order to leave no token of his presence behind him; but again his precaution proved unnecessary, for Johnson, who had looked out, uttered the word, "Rawson!" in a tone of astonishment, and before Cotton could return to the fire, and while Johnson was drawing out the peg which fastened the latch, that worthy individual was already shaking at the crazy door, and desiring admission.

"Confound it," cried Rawson, with repeated imprecations, "do you mean to keep me waiting an hour out here?"

"Halloo, there!" said Cotton, laughing as the door opened, "that sounds human-like; you must be in a monstrous hurry. Suppose there had been strangers here, heh? the reverend preacher would have looked fine with a string of oaths in his mouth."

"The d—l take them all!" cried the preacher, angrily. "It will very soon be the same thing whether the people here believe that I pray or curse. I must quit these parts."

"What?" exclaimed Johnson, leaping in alarm from the stool upon which he had just

seated himself, "quit these parts? Have they discovered that?"

"Nonsense!" said the preacher, in a tone of ill-humor, "learn to guard your tongue; nothing is as yet discovered, but everything may be, at any moment. The Indian has returned."

"I wish his devil, Nanabozo, as he calls him, had carried him off on the road," said the hunter; "the red-skin is a thorn in my eye. I'd give something to have him put out of the way."

"Well, the Indian can't make grass grow," said Johnson, laughing scornfully, while he filled his cup anew, and reached another to Rawson, who emptied it at a draught; "the tracks are washed away long since, and the copper-colored rascal can't bring them back again."

"That isn't all," said the preacher; "the Regulators are moving in good earnest. Tomorrow, they are to hold a great meeting, and there are some suspicious persons living in this part of the country whom they intend to seize and question; you know what that means. Ha! do you like that?"

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed Johnson, "in that case, I think my health would be improved by change of air. The first place they'd make for would be this old den, but I can't see what you have to fear. No one can have the least suspicion of you."

"It's the Indian I'm afraid of," said Rawson, grinding his teeth. "If I only knew how to get rid of the skulking scoundrel!"

"That will be a difficult business," said Cotton, thoughtfully, "yet it's possible—"

"Yes, and set the whole country in commotion! No; blood enough has flowed. The best plan will be to clear out, and that soon, for the storm may break upon our heads any day."

"Only it must be managed prudently," continued Cotton, without heeding the preacher's objection. "They all say here that the Indian killed a chief of his tribe, and then fled. Now, nothing is more natural than for some relation of the dead man's to follow him, and take vengeance. But, to do this safely, he would naturally have resort to nothing else than an arrow—a poisoned arrow—and any man who has lived long in Arkansas or Texas ought to know how to make such an arrow."

"Do you understand how to prepare the poison?" asked Rawson, quickly.

"But what's the use of that?" cried Johnson, interposing; "the Indian is only one man, and we can easily dispatch him. The danger lies deeper. If these infernal Regulators should hit upon the right track, and seize Weston, who has more tongue than heart, the d—l himself couldn't help us. No—in that case, Rawson's right, and it would be better if we were all to shift our quarters. Yet, we can wait; there are some of us who are not suspected—for example, Rawson, and even Atkins. You, Rawson, must be present at the meeting of the Regulators; and if you hear anything that looks like danger, why, let us know, and we'll mount horse and away. We can find an Arkansas anywhere."

"I should doubt that," replied Rawson, "and, besides, you single fellows may well talk; you throw rifle across shoulder, and as soon as you have the right leg over the saddle, you are free men. But I—"

"You're a single fellow yet," interrupted Johnson.

"Yes, to-day; but I sha'n't be day after tomorrow."

"You look too much on the dark side of things, Rawson. If I had such a name in the neighborhood as you have, and was in such good odor with the women, d—n me if ten horses would drag me out of Yell county! But if you are so anxious, why do you marry? Postpone the business."

"I can't draw back now without exciting suspicion," answered the preacher, pacing the chamber rapidly. "If I had only known all this this morning!—then it would have been possible, at least, to delay the affair; but when I am once married, my wife will have to follow me wherever I go. A letter from an old aunt in Memphis, whom I want to see before she dies, will be a sufficient excuse; and, when I am once off, they may say what they please about me. I'll take care they don't find me again. My only fear is the Indian, the infernal red-skin!"

"Well," muttered Cotton, "if he grows too dangerous, we will quickly settle him! But

now, as you say, it would breed ill blood among the neighbors, and the last that was shed made quite as much noise as was necessary."

"Why trouble our heads about the Indian?" cried Johnson. "It's the Regulators that we have to fear; that is the quarter where danger threatens us; that is the side where we must work. Can you be present at the meeting, Rawson?"

"Yes—I hope so," replied the latter; "at least, they have, as yet, given no sufficient reason against it. I mean to try it, at any rate."

"Good! then we have, as yet, no cause to be anxious. You can easily inform us of everything of importance, so that we needn't fear of being taken by surprise."

"But I can't possibly venture now to buy Atkins's house and land," said Rawson. "Some accident might betray us, and then I would be finely fixed."

"That depends upon the state of your purse," replied Johnson. "If you don't stand upon the two hundred that he asks for it, you could silence many a suspicion by the purchase; but if that—"

"You are right," said Rawson, resolutely. "I will buy the place next Monday, and for the future I will keep my hands clear of this kind of business. I will, for once, try to live like an honest man, and sleep in quiet."

"It's time," said Cotton, with a scornful laugh. "But I would advise you, Rawson, to remove to the Island with your young wife; that would be a glorious place for a missionary."

Rawson turned away gloomily. Johnson, however, now took up the conversation, and said, addressing the preacher:

"Now that Cotton mentions the Island, I should think it was time to tell me something more about it. I know that it lies in the Mississippi; but, though I have twice taken horses there, I have never been on it. The men who received them were so mum, that I could get nothing out of them."

"So it was with me this last time," cried Cotton, with an oath. "If the Regulators had been upon our heels, they would have caught us; for, hang me, the fellows would have taken us in their boat. We were obliged to give up the horses, and Weston and I lay upon the bank until they came back about two hours after and brought the money. Weston was almost dying with curiosity."

"Well, listen then!" said Rawson, in a whisper, as if he feared lest he might be overheard by some one else. "Can anybody outside hear us?"

"No—no," replied Johnson; "you can speak without fear. But I wish Cotton had brought his dog here instead of leaving it at Atkins's."

"He is better taken care of there," said the other; "but go on—time passes, and I'm tired."

"Well, then," continued Rawson, "I don't see why you shouldn't be informed of the whole of a secret, when you already know enough to betray it. You know the Island—the way there, at least. But further down lies a second, with many secret hiding-places, in case those who live on the upper one should be attacked or surprised. A good swimmer can easily reach the lower one unperceived, especially at night. The people who live on it were under Murrell's command, who is now a cobbler, or something of the kind in the Philadelphia penitentiary; at any rate, they have taught him some trade or other. At the present time, their leader is a certain—but the name is nothing to the business; I have sworn not to mention it."

"It is a regularly-organized band, then?"

"Yes, and a better one never existed. Besides, it is almost secure against discovery; for those who are connected with it can be benefited only by its prosperity—never by betraying it."

"And in what way do they drive their trade, since their neighbors are never annoyed by them, nay, do not even suspect their existence?"

"They manage it as the fox does," answered Rawson, laughing; "he never steals a hen, unless sore pressed, from the farms nearest his den. We imitate him in this respect."

"Oh, spare us your moralizing, if you please," muttered Cotton; "to the point—to the point!"

"Well, then, to the point. They have very little to do with the States between which they live, except Mississippi; and it is for this rea-

son that they get their horses from us, for they have to be very careful in this respect in that thickly-settled State. They have their agents in all the large cities on the Mississippi, as well as the Ohio, the Wabash, and the Illinois; nay, even on the Missouri. They are mostly young fellows from Kentucky and Illinois; and their business is to spy around and find out what boats are going down the river, and what they are laden with. If it's anything that they want, or that they think they can sell quickly and to advantage in the Southern States, they apply for the berth of pilot, and, if that can't be got, they engage as common hands. They then steer the boat directly for the Island, and, in one way or another contrive to run it ashore. Of course, this has to be done in the night, when not more than one of the boat's crew are on deck. A previous signal announces the approach of the new prize, and the crew—are thrown overboard!"

"Fire and brimstone!" cried Cotton, "I don't wonder any longer where all the corpses in the Mississippi come from. I was in Natchez, in the beginning of February, and seven of them came down together, and all without the slightest wound. We thought a boat had upset with them."

"Yes, they know how to manage it," said Rawson, smiling; "but the business is too ugly for me—I want to have nothing to do with it."

"Nor I either," replied Cotton, shuddering. "The Lord help us! that's downright butchery. And when there are women in the boats?"

"Young women are kept on the Island, and carefully concealed, for each man is permitted to have one wife."

"They never put these out of the way, then?"

"I don't know—it's no concern of mine," replied Rawson; "but the best thing about the Island is, that we can all consider it as a last place of refuge. When we are in extreme danger, we will be received and protected there; that you may depend upon."

"I found that out the last time," cried Cotton. "I might have perished on the shore, and not one of the hounds would have stirred a hand!"

"Because you didn't know the right signal," replied Rawson, laughing. "Do you think they'll take every one across that stands on the bank, and screams and beckons?"

"But what is the signal?"

"Run back and forth four times between the two powcorm trees that stand on the bank—in the night, of course, with a lighted torch—and see how quickly armed men will cross in a boat."

"Four times, then?" said Cotton, thoughtfully. "Well, who knows how soon we shall be obliged to ask hospitality of these people?"

"But when once you have set foot upon the Island," answered Rawson, in a warning tone, "you are theirs irrevocably—"

"Were you ever on it?" asked the hunter, casting a side-glance upon the preacher.

"No—never," replied the latter, briefly. "But where is Weston? Would it not be better to warn him of the danger that threatens us?"

"Atkins has sent him into the upper settlement," answered Johnson. "He was to return in the morning, and then come here."

"Well," said Cotton, yawning, "I'm tired and I'm going to sleep. Is there anything left in the kettle, Johnson?"

"No, you have the last in your cup."

"Well, then, good-night; and he who wakes first in the morning, must wake the others." With these words, he spread out a couple of deerskins that lay in the corner, wrapped a woolen blanket about his shoulders, threw himself upon the hard couch, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

Johnson and Rawson sat silent near each other, and gazed upon the glimmering coals. Each had something upon his mind, but neither was willing to begin the conversation; and the preacher had already risen several times from his seat, walked up and down the chamber, and stopped again near the chimney. Johnson at last broke the silence, and said in a whisper:

"Do you fear that they have discovered us?"

"No," replied Rawson, in a similar tone, "no; but I fear they will."

"How is it possible?"

"Possible? Rather ask how it is possible they should not."

"You are a fool, and see ghosts everywhere."

"Such, fellow, as never harmed any one," replied the preacher, gloomily. "I fear that the Indian suspects something; the look that he gave me to-day almost makes me certain of it."

"You have particular cause to fear the Indian," said Johnson, softly.

"Who told you?"

"Hist!" replied his comrade, quieting him; "he, yonder. But—be still!—it's better for you, perhaps, that I know it. Besides, it was necessary, and I would have done the same myself; but were you careful to remove all traces?"

"The question is unnecessary. I washed my clothes the same night, although the wound in my arm rendered it difficult. The hole that the little witch's tomahawk made in my coat-sleeve, I cut out, and set in a patch, and my knife I buried for four weeks. But, for all this, a strange fear disturbs me when I think of that evening, and—I don't know—I feel, at times, as if I half-regretted it."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Johnson, scornfully.

"How is it with the other business? Did you find the little knife again?"

"No," replied Rawson, in a tone still lower than before. "Roberts has it—I have seen it—he asked me whether I knew it. Johnson, I can't yet comprehend how it was that I didn't betray myself at that moment."

"A fellow is said to have been robbed, on the Arkansas, of more than a thousand dollars," said the other, casting a side-glance at his comrade. "You were in that part of the county at the time: did you hear anything about it?"

"A plague upon your senseless chattering!" replied the preacher, with an oath. "What! must I know about every murder that's committed in the State? Attend to your own affairs, and let mine alone! But are you sure that Weston will keep a close mouth? We ought not to have sent him to the Island."

"I think he's true," returned Johnson, thoughtfully; "yet you can't see into a man's heart. But do you really intend to get married day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, although not under the most favorable circumstances; but it's the best I can do. If this business takes wind too soon, I shall look out for bag and baggage: it will be the smallest kind of a sin to think of my wife last."

"With such principles, marriage won't interfere much with your business," cried his friend, with a hoarse laugh. "You care nothing for the girl, then?"

"Do you think I would have risked all to obtain her if I did not love her?" asked the preacher, quickly. "I love her desperately, and—I know it well—this very love is the greatest sin that I have ever committed."

"And still you can already think of leaving her?"

"Show me the possibility of taking her with me in my flight—against her will—and you will find me ready, body and soul; but it cannot be. Every stranger she might call upon would afford her protection, and this is a risk we cannot expose ourselves to. No—if I could now draw back, perhaps I should do so; but it can't be. Therefore, she may share my fate as long as possible. She will have been mine!"

"Have you made any preparations at home, in case flight should be necessary?"

"I should think you had known me long enough not to ask that question," replied the preacher. "In the little canebrake, just below the house, there lies a good canoe, carefully concealed; a small chest, with everything necessary for travelers, has been standing ready packed since the night on which the squaw discovered us; and my weapons are always in order, and near at hand. The secret passage you know yourself."

"How many will the canoe carry?"

"Four—or five, in case of need; it's large enough, and well built. With three paddles we can reach the Arkansas in six hours."

"That's prudently contrived; though I hope we sha'n't need it. If we can turn the Regulators from our track this time, we are safe. But good-night! Lie yonder, on the mattress."

Rawson, who was very weary, readily complied with the invitation, and for a short time not a sound was heard, except the deep breathing of the slumberers. Suddenly the loud, shrill cry of an owl resounded through the silent night; then it was heard a second, and then a third time. Johnson arose, and step-

ping over the sleepers, who were lying in the middle of the floor, advanced toward the door.

"Well, what are you groping around here for?" asked Rawson, angrily, as Johnson accidentally trod upon his arm.

"Didn't you hear the owl?" replied the other, in a whisper.

"Well, God help us, you don't want to shoot owls!" muttered the weary man; "but, true, you have no chickens here to—"

"Hist!" answered Johnson, as the same sound was repeated, and now heard four separate times. "It's Atkins, by all that lives! What can send him here at this time of night? Come in," he then said, stepping to the door—"come in! there are none but friends here."

"Good-evening, Johnson!" said the broad-shouldered farmer, as he stepped over the low fence, and approached the door. "We are late visitors, eh?"

"Well, why, who have you with you?"

"A friend who brings wares. He wants to make your acquaintance. But who is with you in the house?"

"Cotton and Rawson."

"Rawson?" repeated the stranger, who had stood wrapped in his dark-colored cloak, and now stepped hastily forward—"Rawson? I didn't expect to meet an old acquaintance this evening."

"An old acquaintance?" muttered Rawson, who had approached the chimney, where he was now employed in rekindling the half-extinct coals—"an old acquaintance? Who can that be?"

"You know Rawson, then?" said Atkins.

"I should think so," rejoined the man, laughing. "Does he still preach?"

"That he can answer best himself," said the preacher, in not the friendliest tone, as he stepped to the door, holding aloft a burning piece of pine. Scarcely, however, had he recognized the stranger, who now advanced and stood near the light, when he reached out his hand, and cried joyfully:—

"Hocker, as I live! And what brings you into Arkansas again? Was Missouri too warm for you? Well, you are heartily welcome, old boy. But come in! the wind will blow out the light."

"We can't stay long," replied Atkins, "for we have only stolen from the house for a minute or so."

"Oh, don't stand talking there!" cried Cotton, from within; "the time will pass no slower there than here, and the open door lets in a confounded cold draught."

No objection could be offered to this admonition; and following Rawson, who led the way with the light, the men approached the fire, where the empty cups lay around in confusion.

"Have you a drink left?" asked Atkins, as he bent down to the large iron pot, and held the light so that its rays illuminated the interior; "as true as I live, not a drop!"

"Have patience for a quarter of an hour, and you shall have some," rejoined Johnson.

"No," replied Atkins, "we must—"

"Well, then, say what you have to say," cried their host, interrupting him; "in the meanwhile, the water will be boiling. That, at least, can't hinder you."

"Well, Hocker, how do matters stand in Missouri?" inquired Rawson, once more shaking him warmly by the hand.

"First of all, don't call me Hocker any more," replied the stranger. "My name is Jones, if any one should ask you."

"Well, well!" said Rawson with a wink, "the name's all one. But what brings you here?"

The stranger, who, as soon appeared from his conversation, had been quite an intimate friend of Rawson's, now went on to say that he had left Missouri on account of several "difficulties," and had taken up his abode in Franklin and Crawford counties, in the western part of the State; but that, what with the whites and Indians, it was impossible to "do business" there, as he expressed it. At present, a partnership concern had led him to visit Yell county, as some "envious fellows" had rendered their favorite route down the Arkansas rather dangerous, and he intended to remain in this neighborhood for a few days at least, partly to "let his tracks grow cold," and partly to become better acquainted with this district and its present condition, as he had always felt a great partiality for it, and had lately heard so much said in its favor.

Rawson had listened to his friend's words with great attention, often expressing his ap-

proval by repeated nods; but when the latter had ended, and Johnson had filled their cups with the sweet and spicy beverage which he had in the meanwhile freshly concocted, he leaped up, stretched out his hand to Jones, and cried:—

"Will you be ours? If you will at once perform your part in the play that we are acting here, why, say so, and you can begin business to-morrow morning!"

"My business was begun long ago," replied the stranger, smiling; "my affairs have prospered pretty well of late. I haven't wasted the time that I spent in New Orleans. But it's a bargain! If I can help you, and can at the same time be useful to my friends up the country, why, you have found your man; although I do not exactly see how I can."

"You shall hear at once," said Rawson, rubbing his hands in great glee, as he took his seat again, and at the same time half-drained the cup which Johnson reached to him. "To-morrow the Regulators hold their meeting."

"Well, if that's the joyful tidings that you have to tell me," replied Jones, laughing, "you might have spared yourself the trouble; that is a reason rather why I should leave you sooner than I intended."

"No, you mustn't do that," cried Rawson; "you must be present at the meeting."

"If you have lost your senses!" exclaimed Jones, in astonishment.

"Yes, you," continued Rawson, calmly. "None of the settlers here are acquainted with you. Those who lived in this quarter at the time that you built Atkins's house, are long since dead, or have moved away. I myself intended, at first, to be present at their meeting; but there are several objections to this. In the first place, I shall scarcely have the time to-morrow, though if you had not come, I would have tried to manage it. But then several on the river here are not very friendly to me, and I am firmly convinced that they would avoid speaking of many things in my presence. I will stop at Atkins's before you set out, and will introduce you to young Brown as a 'Regulator from Missouri,' who has visited Arkansas to effect a union between the Regulators of the two States, that they may act in concert to remedy the mischief which, as regards horseflesh, threatens to ruin the honest and industrious farmers of the back-woods."

"Excellent! glorious!" shouted Atkins; "that's what I call a plan!"

"But I am not sure that I have time," replied Jones, with an air of hesitation, as he tapped his empty cup upon the seat before him.

"Time?" rejoined Rawson; "you can't employ your time better than in discovering and thwarting projects which, if put into execution, would render all business here impossible for you and your friends, or at least so dangerous, that no reasonable man would risk his neck in attempting it."

"That's true," said Jones, thoughtfully, as he held his cup near the kettle to be filled again, "that's true—but—will Brown believe me? I said nothing on the subject to him this evening."

"But then you didn't know that he was a Regulator, and you were not such a fool as to blab out your secret to every stranger."

"Certainly—not bad; but will the other Regulators—"

"There's no danger there," interrupted Johnson. "I've heard them talk of trying to form a union with the neighboring States, and your offer will be just the thing to suit them."

"A spy! a real, genuine spy!" exclaimed Jones; "and placed among the Regulators, like a violet in a bunch of roses. A very amusing adventure!"

"And you consent?" asked Rawson.

"Of course," cried Jones, laughing. "Ha, ha! I shall send some galloping off one way, some another, after the stolen horses. I shall get a right good name in the county here; and some day, when we want to make a grand stroke, we'll send them all upon a false track, and—ha, ha, ha!—we shall have the coast clear—a capital idea!"

"And you won't go to the meeting, then, to-morrow, Rawson?" inquired Cotton.

"No, it is not necessary now," replied the other.

"But how shall we learn the result of their deliberations?"

"If anything important is on foot," answered Rawson, thoughtfully, "Jones, who,

at any rate, will return to Atkins's toward evening, can send over his mulatto to inform you; but I have important business to attend to, to-morrow morning, and I must pass the evening at Roberts's. At nine o'clock on Sunday, however, I will be at the cross-oak—you know the tree, Atkins—a persimmon-branch has fallen into the crotch of it, so that it looks like a cross. Well, I'll be there, and you can send the mulatto to me. Send him, in any case, for it's possible I may have a message for you, and I sha'n't have time to ride the whole distance."

"That's settled, then," said Atkins: and now, come, Jones, or we may be missed at home. The d—l's to pay in my house this evening; my child is sick, and Betsey has sent the mulatto and the white workmen in all directions after help. Three old women from the neighborhood had arrived before we left, and I haven't the slightest doubt but by morning the house will be full. It has happened before."

"But don't let Brown go till I come," said Rawson.

"No, never fear; but don't make it too late, for though I can delay breakfast for half an hour or so, yet I can't keep him waiting all day."

The men now uttered a low "Good-night" to each other. Atkins and Jones leaped over the fence, and disappeared in the darkness; while the rest sought their beds anew, to indemnify themselves for the interruption to their slumbers caused by their late and unexpected visitors. Cotton, however, muttered, as he wrapped himself again in his blanket: "If any one disturbs me a second time to-night, I'll twist his neck—that's certain!" And, in a few moments, his loud snoring proved his weariness, and the need he felt of repose.

CHAPTER XII.

THE furious west wind, which had raged during the preceding night, with a last, desperate exertion of its strength, rolled a mass of dark, stormy clouds together, the contents of which it shook in flying showers upon the earth; but then, faint and exhausted, it abated at the approach of day, and when the first rays of the sun kissed the distant hill-tops, repose and stillness lay upon the softly-rustling forest.

In harmony with the cheerful morning, a single horseman, mounted upon a powerful steed, and whistling a merry tune, rode through the wood along the narrow road that led to Bowitt's. At intervals, he urged on the good beast that bore him, in order to reach the nearest house, which stood three miles distant, in time for breakfast, as he had left home fasting, that he might not arrive too late at the meeting of the Regulators. Suddenly Cook (for it was no other than our friend, the blue-eyed farmer) drew upon his bridle, and with such violence that his horse reared upon its hind legs, and performed sundry very singular evolutions; then, however, it paused, quiet and still, as becomes a hunter's horse, and now, apparently not less astonished than its master, pricked up its ears, and listened to a sound which it could scarcely have expected to hear on this spot.

Not a house was to be found within a circuit of full three miles; and still here, in the midst of the forest, exactly behind yonder thicket of holly and sassafras bushes, a wakeful cock, in excellent voice, was tuning his morning song, and Cook glanced about him with surprise and even perplexity.

"I'm sure I haven't lost my way," he muttered; "no, God help me! I know every deer and cow path in the forest. Can they be new settlers? That's scarcely possible in this spot. But, halloo! here are the tracks of wheels turning from the road. It's true the rain has almost washed them away; but it's a fact—there they have rode down a bush and here struck against an oak—pioneers, then—ah, we shall hear something new." And, with a slight pressure of his knee, he informed the beast which he bestrode of his wish to overtake the strangers. The animal did not need much persuasion, for an indistinct presentiment of various bright-yellow years of corn, brought in a wooden tub, arose, probably, before its imagination; and, neighing loudly, it trotted briskly forward to overtake these new acquaintances.

In a few moments the horseman had reached the little light which separated him from the strangers, and now beheld before him one of

those encampments of pioneers, which are so often met with in Arkansas, on the way to Texas or the far West.

Two large wagons, covered with white linen, formed the center of the group, around which several pairs of oxen stood fastened, held together, two-and-two, by a large wooden yoke. A little white-headed boy, of about eight or nine years of age, was thrusting short pieces of corn-cobs into their mouths; while the beasts, with their large, mild eyes fastened dull and sleepy upon the piece next to be given them, chewed and swallowed with the utmost quietude that which they had already received, and then with their long, slender tongues, licked the hand or sleeve of their young feeder, to admonish him that they were now ready for another portion. Five horses, with bells about their necks, and their feet bound together or "hobbled," were grazing in the luxuriant thicket close at hand; and the pioneers themselves, who had probably passed the night in the wagons—as there was no tent or cover to be seen, where a man could have slept during the rain—were upon the point of reclining around the table, which consisted of boards laid upon the ground, and which, covered with a large linen cloth, perfectly supplied the place of a breakfast-table; while the cheerful cock, whose clear notes had betrayed the proximity of strangers, again uttered his cry of warning or of welcome.

The little family, consisting of the husband, the wife, two young daughters, and three young lads, the eldest of whom was about one-and-twenty years of age, now took their places, in true Turkish fashion, around the frugal board.

"Come, Ben!" cried the father to his youngest son, "the cattle have got enough; they have been standing the whole night in the rushes—be quiet, dogs! what's the matter with the beasts again—they have been barking and yelping all night, because a skulking panther took it into its head to howl near by—down with you!"

Notwithstanding this admonition the beasts, who were fast tied under the wagons, were far from being inclined to obey the order, but barked with redoubled fury, leaping toward the road, from which Cook now appeared, and approached them.

"Good-morning to you all!" he cried, in a friendly tone, as, when scarcely ten paces from them, he leaped from the saddle, and threw the bridle upon the neck of his snorting beast—"good-morning! how does it taste?"

"We are going to see," cried the farmer. "Come, sit down here with us, and eat, if you hav'n't breakfasted. Here, Ann, a cup for the gentleman!—fall to, help yourself!"

"Thank you," said Cook, complying with this hearty invitation without the slightest ceremony, "this suits me to a hair; I didn't expect to find such good company and such an excellent breakfast right in the middle of the woods here." With these words he looked around after his horse, which, wisely enough, wished to take advantage of this opportunity to break his fast, and, pricking up his ears, stood gazing toward the wagon, where Ben was rattling the corn.

"Ben, bring an armful of corn here!" cried the farmer. "You can put it in the iron pot that stands yonder near the wagon; the beast won't be particular as to the kind of ware he eats it out of."

By a low, half-suppressed neigh, the animal expressed his entire approval of this proposition, and when Ben had removed the saddle and bridle, he at once proceeded to do honor to the meal that was set before him.

"And where do you come from, stranger?" inquired Cook, at last, after an interval of about a quarter of an hour, which had been occupied by the several members of the little circle, in a manner admirably calculated to effect the object which had gathered them about the low table.

"From Tennessee, on Wolf river."

"And where are you going?"

"To Franklin county, at the foot of the Ozark mountains."

"Have you fixed upon a spot?"

"Not in particular; but I shall soon find one. I have a brother living there."

"Ahem! there's capital land hereabouts too."

"Yes, I know it; but the people on the La Fave are said to be rather too fond of horse-flesh."

"Ha, ha!" cried Cook, laughing. "Have

the folks on the Arkansas already put that crotchet into your head? Well, to speak the truth, matters are bad enough here. I am now upon my way to a meeting of the Regulators, and I hope we shall soon put a stop to the mischief. Arkansas must no longer be named, when the talk is of thieves and robbers."

"Arkansas!" cried the farmer, laughing heartily—"who spoke of Arkansas? Well, yes, in the United States generally, in Tennessee, and further south, north, and east, the word is Arkansas, when they speak in this way; but the moment you cross the Mississippi, and get into the state itself, then the word is the La Fave. You have a remarkable reputation in the county here."

"It may be so," replied Cook, "but it's not yet so bad as they make out; and if there are a few good-for-nothing rascals in this quarter, we will soon rid the county of them. I wish you could be present at our meeting to-day—and then it's Saturday, and you will hardly travel further to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" rejoined the farmer: "because it's Sunday? That makes no difference. Fine weather is given to be used, and as I should like to plant an acre or two of corn, if I can get a bit of tilled ground with the rest, I have little time to lose, as you well know."

"No, of course not; but I thought it might interest you to become acquainted with the laws that govern us in this part of the country."

"Certainly, it would!" said the Tennessean. "And do you really mean then to enforce Lynch law? I heard so at home, but I didn't believe it."

"Yes, for we are compelled to," replied Cook. "Matters are not yet so well arranged in Arkansas, that we can bring the criminals to justice, and keep them safe in prison; all is yet too new here. Still, in no State is it more necessary than in this; therefore something must be done, if we would save ourselves from ruin, for, as you yourself say, we have already such a name in the other States, that not another man will settle here, and our land, if it does not depreciate, will, at least, never rise in value."

"Yes, yes," said the Tennessean, "all right! We did just so some five years ago. A number of rascals had banded together in the district, but a few yards of hemp soon scattered the rogues. And it's not so mighty safe on the other side of the Arkansas either. As we were riding up the river, in the early part of the week, a settler, who had been to the Indian nation to sell hogs, was murdered by a scoundrel on his return."

"I heard of it," said Cook. "Hav'n't they discovered the murderer?"

"No!" cried the old man, striking his fist angrily upon the table, so that a small glass salt-cellar started from the loose boards which composed it—"no! and I only wish the smooth-faced knave would come as near me again as he did then, and I, with my rifle in rest, behind a tree or on the open prairie, hang me, if I wouldn't let day through his skull, that's certain!"

"You know him then?"

"No, I don't know him, but I saw him, for I am sure it couldn't be anybody else. Our wagons were going along the road, while I and Ned here, my eldest boy, had walked a bit aside with our rifles, thinking, perhaps, we might shoot a deer, for we had seen a great many tracks on the way. Presently, we came to a small lake—Ned went on one side and I the other—and I soon observed a narrow path, which ran from the thicket, and seemed to lead to the road where we had just left the wagons, about half a mile behind us. I now heard something rustle in the bushes, and, thinking it was a deer or a flock of wild turkeys, I stepped behind a tree; but they were two horsemen, both dressed in coarse blue woolen stuff, one of them with a broad-brimmed hat upon his head. They were talking very earnestly together, and rode by without seeing me. I didn't speak to them, for I didn't want to make any unnecessary noise, as it would startle the game that might be near in the wood."

"I had walked slowly on for, perhaps, a hundred paces, and the strangers had disappeared in the bushes, when I heard a shot in the very direction they had taken. At first, I thought that Ned hadn't been able to get around the lake, and was following me, and had got a chance at some sort of game, for neither of the two men carried a rifle; so I shouted out to know whether he had hit anything. The next

minute the boy answered me from the opposite side of the lake; and naturally supposing that there was another hunter in the neighborhood, I walked quietly onward.

"This was late in the afternoon, and the same evening people overtook us on the road, where we were camping, and told about a murder that had been committed. The man had been shot through the head. None of my folks had seen the horsemen pass our wagons. When I heard this, I at once mounted my horse, and galloped to the place where the body lay, a farmhouse, not far from the spot where the deed had been committed. It was as I suspected; the murdered man was one of the two men whom I had seen ride by together that self-same day, and the other, the rascal with the broad-brimmed hat, was, of course, the murderer. I described him as well as I could, but no one present knew him, or remembered ever to have met him. I remained for two days in the neighborhood, hoping to light upon the track of the murderer, but he had disappeared; and, according to the calculation of some people, who knew exactly how many hogs the murdered man had taken with him, and the price they bring with the Indians, he must have had about a thousand dollars with him, of which not one cent was, of course, ever seen again."

"Yes, yes," said Cook, "and like things have been done here—even worse. Well, we hope to strike the snake upon the head that has crept into this neighborhood, at least. The men across the Arkansas may see to it, how they manage matters on their side of the river. But what road do you mean to take?"

"I don't exactly know myself—does the road run on this side of the river?"

"Yes, and on the other too. I should think to cross would be the best for you; for further up, where the left hand fork flows in, it's awkward passing the river, especially with wagons."

"In what way can I best get across? How far is it to the nearest house?"

"The nearest house is Wilson's," said Cook; "the second, about a mile and a half further on, is Atkins's, but you can cross at the first; there is a very good ferry-boat there, and a smooth, broad road down to the edge of the water."

"Is the ferryman's name Wilson?"

"No, he only lives there; the ferryman's name is Curneales."

"Well, I thank you for your advice, and will follow it; and if you ever come into my neighborhood, inquire after old Stevenson and pay me a visits you will be heartily welcome."

"Thank you, thank you!" said Cook, who had risen, and had now saddled and bridled his horse; "it's time now for me to start or I shall be too late, I have several miles to ride. Good-by!"

With a hearty greeting, and a warm pressure of the hand, the young farmer now took leave of each member of the family, not forgetting Ben, who had so faithfully fed his horse, and soon he was trotting onward, singing and conversing with the animal, which seemed to share in its master's satisfaction.

After riding briskly for about an hour, he reached Atkins's door, where, to his astonishment, he found Brown, who he supposed had long since repaired to the place of meeting, or was, at least, upon the way thither. The young man was standing in the road, near the saddled horses, engaged in an animated conversation, with the stranger who had arrived on the preceding evening, and whom Mr. Rawson, who had just ridden up, had introduced to him as an old friend.

"Halloo, Cook!" cried Brown, joyfully, "that is capital! now you are here we can ride in company."

"Good-morning! good-morning!" cried the latter; "I supposed you were long since upon the road."

"That's my fault," said Atkins, reaching Cook his hand, or, at least, my wife's who has delayed uncommon long with the breakfast; the sick child may have hindered her, perhaps."

"I ought to have started long ago," said Brown, "but Mr. Atkins—"

"Why, not without having eaten a morsel," said the latter, interrupting him; "no, I would never have consented to that; but you will get there in time, and then you have gained a new companion by waiting."

"There is nothing lost by the delay," said Brown, turning to his friend Cook, and shak-

ing him by the hand. "But, Mr. Rawson," he added, addressing the latter, who had just given his horse into the hands of the mulatto, "are you not coming with us? I thought, as you rode up, that that was the object of your visit here."

"I would very gladly be present at this meeting, did not important business hinder me to-day. To-morrow, you know, I am to be married, and you can not think it strange, if, under such circumstances, I have engagements which admit of no delay."

"Certainly," replied Brown, almost in a whisper. "And this gentleman, as you say, is a Regulator? He did not mention a syllable of it last evening."

"You will easily comprehend that," said Mr. Jones, smiling, "when you reflect that I was among entire strangers."

"Certainly, it was acting with the most praiseworthy prudence. You were going to Fort Gibson, I think you said last evening?"

"That was my intention, and is so still; but as I have thus accidentally and unexpectedly met an old friend here in Mr. Rawson, I think I shall remain a few days in the neighborhood; and it would afford me great satisfaction, if I could attend your meeting to-day; perhaps, it will be possible to form a union between the Regulators in this State and our band in the north, a step which might prove to the advantage of both."

"No doubt of it," replied Brown, gazing steadfastly upon him. "And you wish to be introduced to the Regulators by me?"

"I do; and you would greatly oblige me by—"

"You will oblige me also," said Rawson, interrupting him; "and, although owing to the present state of my household, he can not find accommodation with me, yet, perhaps, Mr. Atkins will be so kind as to afford him lodging for the night; we can settle together afterward."

"Never fear, Mr. Rawson," said Brown, with a singular smile, "there is no doubt that Mr. Jones can find accommodations with us for a while; whether they will please him, is another question."

"I am very easily contented," replied Jones, in a friendly, careless tone; "but hadn't we better start? it's growing late."

"Mr. Jones's horse!" cried Atkins, turning to the mulatto, who was standing at the door, and staring with open eyes at the men.

"Hark ye, Brown, that fellow's face doesn't please me," whispered Cook, as he bent toward his friend's ear.

"When we reach Bowitt's, I must speak a word or two with you in private," answered the latter, in the same tone.

"Is there any—"

"Hist! be quiet—it will be time enough when we are there."

In the mean while Jones had mounted his horse, and Brown leaped into the saddle at the moment when the mulatto led out two other horses, one of which was furnished with a side-saddle.

"God bless me!" cried Cook, "another side-saddle; I just now counted seven in the porch, and this is the eighth. What's going on, here?"

"They are visitors come to see my wife," said Atkins, "on the child's account; but this one is for Ellen—she is going across to Roberts's."

At this moment the door was opened, and Ellen, with a sun-bonnet upon her head, and holding in her hand a small bundle, which the mulatto now took from her, came from the house, but when she looked toward Brown, the latter saw that her eyes were red with weeping. She at once turned, however, and, stepping upon the stump of a tree, hewn smooth and set upright for that purpose, mounted into the saddle, and then galloped down the road, followed by the mulatto.

"What is the matter with the girl?" asked Brown, compassionately, addressing the master of the house, who gazed after her, shaking his head, and cutting off an uncommonly large piece of tobacco; "it seemed to me as if she had been crying."

"Nonsense!" replied Atkins, "she doesn't want to leave the sick child; she says she shall never see it again; and then—my wife may have had some words with her—the old woman grumbles now and then, but she doesn't mean half she says. The stupid thing has taken it to heart. Well, well, she'll listen to reason when she once gets a husband."

"Come, Brown, come! it's getting late," cried Cook, impatiently.

"Ay, ay! in a moment," replied the former; "I must say a word or two to Mr. Rawson; I must ask him one question."

"He has gone into the house; you can do that to-morrow, or this evening. It will be noon before we know it, and the men have been waiting for us, doubtless, for the last four hours."

"Well, then, good-by!" said the young man, waving his hand to those who remained behind, and followed by the others, he spurred at a quick trot along the road that led into the forest.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE bright morning sun was shining calmly and peacefully upon Roberts's comfortable dwelling; the pines and oaks that environed the field and barn-yard had not yet lost their pendants of dewy pearls which were now falling upon the fragrant earth. Marion and her mother were alone; Roberts had gone into the forest with the dogs at daybreak, to look after his cattle, but had promised to return before noon. Mrs. Roberts was busied among the pans and kettles, skillfully preparing a rare and sumptuous meal for the occasion. Marion had undertaken the task of making bread, and was kneading the soft white meal with her still softer and whiter hands, into small flat biscuits, which, after being pierced with a fork, were to be baked in the large iron bake-pan, but they now lay in long, even rows upon the table. When she had finished her task, she stood, silent and thoughtful, her hands clasped, her head leaning, as if wearied, against the brightly-scoured door-post, and gazed down along the road.

"Isn't he coming yet?" asked her mother, as she uncovered a jar of pickles, and pricked one of them with a fork, to prove its firmness.

"Who?" inquired Marion, starting, and turning quickly to her mother.

"Who?" continued the latter, without remarking this movement; "who, silly child? why, Sam. Didn't you send him yourself to Mr. Harper's, to invite him here to-day? He hardly deserves to have folks chase around after him so; he hasn't let himself be seen here for I don't know how long—"

"He has been sick—"

"Well, his fine nephew, then, who has now joined the Regulators. Why, you have been sick, too, and it would have been nothing more than common politeness if he had called and asked after you; he was always treated well here, and he has nothing in the world to do at home—"

"He has to take care of his sick uncle," replied Marion, softly.

"Oh, yes, I know—you have always taken his part, ever since that affair with the—"

"The panther," said the deeply-blushing girl, even in a lower tone than before, and with a slight accent of reproach.

"Well, yes—he was of some use then, there's no denying it," muttered the old dame; "but any one else would have done the same in his place, and—but I don't want to say anything against him; he seems a very nice young man, and that's the reason I am angry with him for never coming here. It is true the affair with Heathcote—"

"But, mother!" cried the maiden, reproachfully.

"I know what you are going to say," continued Mrs. Roberts, pertinaciously—"I know what you are going to say; but why hasn't he shown himself here for so long, if he has a good, clear conscience? Mr. Rawson said lately that I was perfectly right to feel so."

"Mr. Rawson has every reason to defend Mr. Brown to the utmost of his abilities," cried Marion, warmly. "That part of his conduct I do not like."

"But he has defended him," replied her mother, "defended him warmly; but how can he help it, if he is unable entirely to get rid of his suspicions?"

Marion turned her head to hide a tear which started involuntarily to her eye. At this moment her mother stepped to the little window, gazed down the road, and beheld three horsemen approaching, whom she soon recognized as Harper and Barker, followed by the negro boy whom she had sent to invite them.

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Roberts, in alarm, "there's Mr. Harper already, and I haven't half finished. Sam deserves a good

beating: I told him to ask them to come at twelve."

"Oh, never mind, mother!" replied Marion, smiling, as she brushed the treacherous drop from her eyelids; "they won't be so very particular—they are good friends of father's. Sam met them on the road, perhaps."

There was no help for it, however; and Mrs. Roberts hastily arranged her cap before the little mirror, smoothed her apron, and then stepped forward to welcome her guests, with a face somewhat heated by her labors, indeed, yet with a kind and hearty air.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Harper!—I'm as glad to see you as if you had risen from the grave," she said, reaching her hand to the little man. "Come in, gentlemen! Mr. Roberts will soon be back; he has only gone into the woods, to look after a couple of cows that haven't come home to be milked this long time. Walk in, Mr. Barker, though things ain't quite in order."

"Mrs. Roberts," said the latter, laughing, "I came without an invitation to-day, and I didn't know that you expected company till I was half-way here."

"I thought you were at the meeting of the Regulators," replied Mrs. Roberts, "or I should have sent over to you. But, come in; we can't talk it over before the door."

The two men accepted this invitation; and Harper, who was still very pale and feeble, was compelled, first of all, to take a seat, and to drink a refreshing draught prepared of honey and the juice of fruits, and then narrate about his illness, tell who had nursed him, what medicines he had taken, and how he had gradually got better. He complied with the utmost willingness, and praised in particular his nephew and his three neighbors, Wilson, Cook, and Roberts. "Even Barker," he continued, reaching the old man his hand, "left his cornfield, and came across to me for a few days. They all treat me kindly, and what can I ask for more here in the woods?"

The conversation now turned upon objects that lay around; that is, upon all kinds of vegetables and other edibles which were partly steaming over the fire, partly piled upon a little side-table, waiting to take their turn, while Mrs. Roberts sought out a sharp knife, saying that she was going into the garden, to get a lettuce.

Barker, who had already told some wonderful narratives of gigantic asparagus and cabbage-heads, insisted upon accompanying her, while Harper remained with Marion.

Although the young girl had been all the morning anxious to be left alone for a few moments with Harper, to hear something of his absent nephew, yet now that this wish was gratified, it seemed as if all her heart's blood rose to her cheeks and brow; the words stuck in her throat, and she was unable to utter a sound. Harper also was silent, yet both pondering, doubtless, upon the same subject—a subject which neither was willing to approach, and still neither could resolve to commence a conversation concerning ordinary affairs. At last, Harper broke the painful silence and said, reaching his hand to the young girl, with a kind yet sorrowful expression of countenance:

"How goes it with you, Marion? Well, I hope, eh? That's right. Be a good, brave girl. I am glad, very glad, to find you so well and cheery. Mr. Rawson," he continued, as Marion gave him her hand in silence, "Mr. Rawson is a very worthy man, and will render you very happy, I am sure. The—lad is a heedless, hair-brained fellow, and—so, you see, it's perhaps better so."

"He is at present with the Regulators," he continued, understanding her inquiring glance, "but all he is after is to find out the real murderers. And, upon my soul, it will be a pleasure to see the rogues hanged."

"And he is not guilty, then?" asked Marion, with an inquiring glance.

"Guilty!" cried Harper, starting from his seat, "guilty! Is there any one who thinks him so? Surely you do not?" he continued, pressing the white hand which he still held in his own; "you do not, I am sure; and soon no one will. I myself, indeed, believed it at first—I knew his impetuous temper; but the money made me hesitate again, and afterward it was found that he had worn his moccasins on that day, and the tracks were made by boots and shoes. No, he is innocent of that deed, and I hope some accident may yet reveal the perpetrator."

"The Regulators, you say, have assembled

for this purpose?" replied the maiden, in a whisper.

"Ah, but they are only men!" said old Harper, shaking his head, "they ain't even Indians. Yes, if Assowaum had remained here—but the fellow has stolen away mysteriously, in true Indian fashion, and nothing has been heard of him since, although Bill firmly believes that he will return."

"Mr. Rawson said lately that the Indian's secret departure spoke very strongly against him," replied Marion.

"Mr. Rawson might be a little more sparing with his suspicions," cried the old man, warmly; "it isn't right to attribute such a deed to a man, even if he is nothing but an Indian. But he never did it; I'd pledge my life for it."

"Does Mr. Brown still intend to go to Texas?" asked the maiden in a voice that faltered with emotion.

"Yes," replied Harper, sadly; "I can't drive the silly idea out of his head. If the murderers were discovered to-day, I believe he would be off to-morrow. Has he bought the horse of your father?"

"That's the reason that I ask," said Marion. "I heard father say this morning that he must catch the bay horse for Mr. Brown, the one that commonly grazes below in the bottom-land. It grieves me to the heart to think that it is I who am the cause of your losing him."

"It is better so," returned the old man, as he rose, and kissed her upon the forehead, "and—it's perhaps well that matters have turned out as they have; who can say? Take courage, therefore, my dear Marion, and look at the bright side of things." With these words, he gently raised her chin, and tried to gaze quietly and cheerfully into her large eyes. His voice trembled, however, and it required the utmost exertion of his self-control to prevent himself from being infected with the sorrow that was visible in her features.

It was very opportunely, therefore, that Mrs. Roberts returned from the garden with Barker, the former laughing, but still with an air of pious indignation in her features, for Mr. Barker had been telling things, she said, which couldn't possibly have happened, as much as she wished to believe him; while Barker, on the contrary, insisted firmly that every word that he had uttered was true, and he appealed to Harper to confirm many things which, as he declared, he had already told him before!

They were still engaged in this half-serious, half-jesting strife, when two horses stopped at the door, and Ellen entered, followed by the young mulatto.

The maidens were old acquaintances, and welcomed each other with great warmth. Mrs. Roberts also received the young orphan with genuine kindness, as Rawson had not only said a great deal in her favor, but had informed her that her foster-mother, Mrs. Atkins, treated her rather like a slave than a child, even an adopted one.

Harper was unacquainted with Ellen. Barker, however, had seen her often; and after the first salutations had passed, she asked her new mistress, or friend, rather, if she had come in time, as she had lingered somewhat at home.

"Time enough, my child," replied Mrs. Roberts, "time enough; we sha'n't ride over to your new dwelling until to-morrow. Many a thing will be found to be missing there, for we can't expect a bachelor's house to be in apple-pie order. Then we shall go to the justice's, where Mr. Rawson is to preach in the afternoon, and there the young folks will be married. In the evening we shall take them home, and you will remain there with Sam, whom you can keep with you for about a fortnight, until things are tidily arranged."

This matter was soon settled, and the hour for dinner was near, but neither Roberts nor Rawson made his appearance and the good dame was growing very impatient. At her repeated request, Barker was obliged to blow a second time upon the long, straight, tin horn, which sent its tones far into the wood, whence it was at last answered by Roberts's hunting-cry; and soon the dogs came barking and yelping down the country-road; and a few moments afterward, Roberts and Rawson, in obedience, probably, to the urgent summons, came spurring toward the house, at a somewhat swifter pace than usual.

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